North • West STORIES

BIG OUTDOOR STORIES OF THE WEST AND NORTH

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GUNMAN'S RANCHO

A complete action novel of the West by

ROY De S. HORN

Stories of the West and North by

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MILES OVERHOLT
TOM J. HOPKINS
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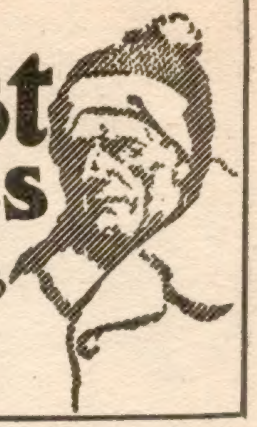
North-West STORIES

BIG OUTDOOR STORIES OF THE WEST AND NORTH



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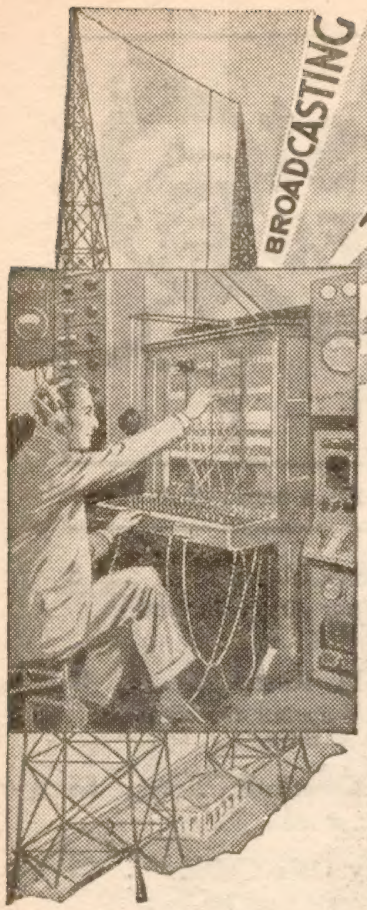

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North•West STORIES

Dedicated to our trail-blazers, sung and unsung, who have paid and are paying with their bodies on the world's last frontiers of the great Northwest and the sun-painted Southwest

GUNMAN'S RANCHO

By ROY De S. HORN

Author of "Prison Island," etc.

SOUTHWEST—Sandy McLeod never learned to run away. So when they tried to haze him out of Buckhannon Valley with gunsmoke threats and reward money, he knew only one road to take. It doubled right back to the men who had tricked him, and laid bounty on his head.

A Complete Novel

SO engrossed was Sandy McLeod in his work that he was completely ignorant of the approach of a horseman who had topped the rise a half mile away and was now riding leisurely toward the ranch house door. In Sandy's lap was a Colt .45 Frontier model revolver; in Sandy's hands were oiled rags and a short cleaning rod. Beside him where he sat on the front steps of the ranch house, was a new box of .45 cartridges.

The oiling finished, Sandy carefully cleaned the oil off the outside and laid the weapon down beside him on a clean piece of paper. Opening the box of cartridges, he examined them minutely,

then began slowly slipping them one at a time into the loops of the leather cartridge belt that lay across his knees.

The cartridge belt was already full of cartridges, some of these almost new, others slightly green from the tarnish of weather. But new or old, Sandy threw them into the dirt below the steps, and refilled each loop with bright new cartridges from the just opened box.

That job finished he once more picked up the pistol and with a clean rag began carefully wiping away the tiniest vestige of oil remaining anywhere on the walnut grip itself, the trigger guard and the hammer—particularly the hammer. The slip of a thumb on a hammer whose cocking sear had been filed away might lead to fatal consequences either for the pistol's owner or other people.

For the first time his ear caught the sound of the approaching horse's hoofs. He looked up hurriedly, made a hasty grab of the weapon and cartridge belt, and then laid them slowly aside as the horseman drew up at the steps. The grimness that had set his lips in a hard, cold line gave way to a quick smile of welcome.

"Howdy, Uncle Dan. Light and rest yo' saddle. Long time no see you out this way."

"Howdy, Sandy—don't mind if I do." The rider, whose seamed face and grizzled hair and mustache placed him well on the far side of sixty, swung down with an agility that a man half his age might have envied. He dropped onto the steps beside the younger man, and drew tobacco sack and cigarette papers from his pocket; the sheriff's badge on his unbuttoned vest glinted as he rolled his cigarette. "Yeah, it's been quite a while since I was out this way. What's the latest news—coyotes bothering your chickens?" This last with a quizzical glance at the very evident pistol and newly opened cartridge box.

SANDY shook his head slowly. "There ain't any chickens—the last McLeod chicken has gone the way of the last McLeod cow and the last McLeod horse—outside of old Buck right there. Nope—it ain't coyotes I've been oiling up Dad's gun for."

"It ain't human coyotes you're oiling her up for, is it, sonny?" The sheriff's tone was still quizzical, but his face was sober. "You ain't lettin' them horse-tradin' Jacksons get you all breachy, are you Sandy?"

For answer the younger man turned on the older one bitterly. "You ain't taking up for them too, are you Uncle Dan? You ain't coming out here for those damned dry-gulchin', horse-stealin', hay-burnin' . . ."

The elderly man with the sheriff's badge grinned. "Easy, easy, Sonny. You'll be committin' a libel first thing you know, an' then I'd have to drag ye in an' jail ye. For that matter," he went on dryly, "you done already committed libel a-plenty, suggestin' I come out here to side with them same damned hay-burnin', horse-stealin', dry-gulchin' side-winders which you was just talkin' about."

As he talked in his slow drawling voice, the fire had died from Sandy McLeod's face; a look of contrition and apology came into it instead. "I'm sorry, Uncle Dan. Of course I knew you weren't in with the Jacksons. But knowin' what's goin' to happen . . ."

"Yeah, but the mortgage ain't due till tomorrow" said the sheriff, "an' even then they got to get dispossess papers. If they get 'em, 'course I'll have to serve 'em. But you won't make it any harder for me, will you, Sandy?"

THE younger man did not answer for a second. He stood up, and stared about him, as if seeing and yet not seeing.

Despite the size of the old ranch house and its sturdiness, it was gloomy with the air of abandonment. There was not a chicken about the place, not a horse in the corral other than the solitary buckskin that stood disconsolately in a corner as if wondering at his own

lonesomeness. From the ranch-house kitchen came no sign of stove smoke or sound of a cook's voice. The door of the nearby bunkhouse stood open and empty, as did also the stable doors beyond the corral. Under the big tool shed there was not a sign of wagon or mowing machine or other tools. Even the grassy hills that rolled away on all sides were astonishingly empty of either saddle or beef stock grazing there—an amazing sight in itself in that horse and cattle country. Over everything was the air of desolation and doom.

"Look at it!" suddenly said the younger man, flinging out his hand toward the landscape. "Look at it! My grandfather—Big Alec McLeod—was the first white man in this valley; he bought it from the Indians, and made it white man's country. He ran tens of thousands of cows here, and hundreds of horses, when there wasn't even a Jackson heard of in these parts. But, tomorrow, there won't be any of it left to the name of McLeod—not a blade of grass, a pair of horns, or a single horse's hoof. All of it will belong to Horse-Trader Jackson, and his thieving tribe!"

"That word *thieving*," said the elderly sheriff judiciously: "I ain't denyin' it may be the fittin' word. But the law says a word like that has got to be proved before it can be applied free an' unrestrained to a man without damage bein' done to his character thereby."

"What proof do you want?" young McLeod asked bitterly. "Twenty years ago, when the Jacksons come here, they didn't have a cent. Now they're the only folks in the valley that's got anything. When everybody else is losin' cows stolen an' run over the border, an' takin' out mortgages and not bein' able to meet 'em, how come the Jacksons all prosper? How come *they* don't lose stock? How come they can even buy up the mortgages that other ranchers have to take on? No wonder Dad worried himself to death, tryin' to find the nigger in the woodpile!"

"Sonny," replied the old sheriff. "You ain't the first man who's had wonderin' ideas like that. But the trouble is, the law demands proof. I been watchin' them Jacksons for years, an' I never been able to get anything on 'em yet. An' that Horse-Trader Jackson is sure a slick trader. When it comes to makin' money, I'd back a good horse-trader against any other man livin'."

He licked and lighted the cigarette he had been rolling, and broke the match in half before dropping it. "Some o' these days, if the Jacksons are crooked, somebody's goin' to find it out. But that ain't what I come out here to talk to you about. What I want to know is, what you aimin' to do tomorrow?"

Sandy McLeod smiled bitterly. "What else is there to do? That note Dad gave to the bank and that the Jacksons bought from it, is due, and I can't pay it. I've sold every hoof and horn there is on the place, exceptin' old Buck there—and I'm keepin' him mostly because he used to be Dad's. I've even sold the chickens and hay and tools—everything. And I still can't pay half the money that's due. So tomorrow the Jacksons will take the old place over—and the last of the McLeods will be put out in the cold!"

"Well, you ain't licked yet, are you, Sonny? You won't be the first man that's had to git in and dig from scratch. Your own Gra'dad — Big Alec—he started just like you're havin' to start. And there's plenty pleasant valleys for a young fellow to make a start in yet, if he looks long and fur enough for 'em. You ain't figurin' on startin' no trouble with the Jacksons tomorrow, I hope? No fool stunt like tryin' to keep 'em off with a gun nor nothin'?"

"No," said Sandy, "tomorrow I won't have anything to say. But today I still own this place—and I got plenty to say!"

THE sheriff sat up. "Huh? What you mean by that?"

"Can you read?" said Sandy, getting up. "This is what I found on my door

this morning." He reached out and drew shut the ranch house door which up to now had been swung back, open. And there, pinned to the door by a knife blade jammed hard into it, was a rough notice scrawled on old wrapping paper with a piece of charcoal:

The Law is givin you ontil tomorow to clear off. But were jest givin you ontil sundown tonite. Git out of here an git out of the valley by then or it will be jest too bad.

There was no signature, but at the lower right hand corner where the name ordinarily would have been was a crude drawing of a man on horseback leading another horse.

The sheriff looked at it a long time, took a pair of spectacles out of his pocket, put them on and looked again, as if incredulous.

"You say it was pinned there last night, sonny? You got any idea who done it?"

"I know who done it," said Sandy decisively. "It ain't got any name signed, so they could deny it if anybody asked 'em. But they signed it just the same so I would be sure and know who it was. That man on a horse, leading another—Horse-Trader, don't you see? Horse-Trader Jackson, his mark."

"Maybe," said the sheriff dubiously. "But to me it looks a whole lot more like Ike Sarles, his foreman—or more likely still that red-headed young Dal Jackson. Dale ain't keered so much for you ever since you had to give him a lickin' that time at the schoolhouse dance. But old Horse-Trader never done that writin'. Fust place, Horse-Trader don't give a damn whether you stay in the valley or not. Second place if Horse-Trader didn't want you here, he wouldn't write to you. He'd ride over here and run you out, personal."

"I'd like to see him try it!"

"I wouldn't. Horse-Trader's the sort of fellow would as soon shoot a man as a coyote, if he figured t'other fellow was in his way. Me, I'd ruther take on Ike Sarles and Dale and all the rest o' the Jacksons lumped together, than Horse-Trader by hisself. He's better'n good with a short gun, an' with a rifle he's plumb pizen—I've seen him shoot. S'pose you saddle up old Buck there, an' ride along back an' spend the night with me? That way, there won't be no trouble if the fellows that wrote that sign really did mean something."

Sandy shook his head. "An' have 'em sayin' I was so scared I hid in the sheriff's house? Nope; I'll be here if they come. An' I kinda wish they would show up."

"All right." As if that settled the matter, the old sheriff stood up. "But they ain't no law that says I can't come ridin' by this way this evenin', if I choose to."

"Let out a yell before you ride up, then. If you come after dark. I don't want to make any mistakes," said Sandy grimly.

AFTER the older man had ridden away, Sandy stood for a long time looking about him, at the empty corrals, lifeless stables and bunkhouse, the empty range. He looked at the sun already in the west and sending its shadows racing toward the eastern hills.

Suddenly with a grim tightening of the lips he picked up his cartridge belt and Colt. He buckled the belt around his body, pulled it until the butt of the holstered gun came just halfway between hip and knee and a little forward. Then, stepping inside the house he brought out a rifle chambered to carry the same cartridges as his Colt, and leaned it against the steps. Quickly but carefully he saddled up the solitary buckskin in the corral, rammed the rifle into the saddle boot beneath his left stirrup leather, and swung up into the saddle.

The Jacksons had given him until sundown to get out of the country, had they? Well, at sundown, he would be in the most conspicuous place he could find, where the whole world as well as the Jacksons could see him, and know he was there, still in the valley.

CHAPTER II
Sundown

IN that last half hour before sunset, as he rode slowly into Buckhannon, Sandy thought with an odd, detached perspective, that he had never seen the little cowtown look so peaceful, so harmless. At that time of year sunset fell at supper time. Most of the merchants and other married townsmen had closed up shop for the day and had gone home for the evening meal. The young buckaroos, freight hustlers and such, had not come into town yet for the evening gaieties at the three saloons and dance halls.

The only person in sight in the one little main street was old Zeke Coffin, storekeeper and postmaster, and he was just dumping an armload of tin cans on the heap behind his store. Somewhere in back of the Oriental restaurant the voice of Sin Foo, the Chinaman, rose in an unmelodious singsong as he concocted supper for some of his unmarried patrons.

Sandy saw and heard these things, without looking for them. His attention was centered on only one thing. Were the Jacksons in town—and if so where?

And then, tied to the hitchrack in front of the livery stable he saw a saddled horse—black with white stockings and a blaze of white across its nose. Sandy knew that horse—to a cowman it was like the calling card left by its owner. It was the private "show-off" horse of red-headed Dale Jackson, youngest and most hot-blooded of the clan.

If Dale had ridden in early, the chances were that others of the Jacksons had, too. But where were their horses—tied back of the livery stables, perhaps?

All these thoughts ran lightning-like through Sandy's head even as he pulled up to a halt. He sat in the saddle for a moment speculating; then, kneeing around, he rode to the hitching post in front of the postoffice, dismounted and tied old Buck to the post with a loose slipknot, the end dangling clear.

Then down the street he strode, walking slowly in his high-heeled boots, his eyes flashing quick glances toward the side stores as he walked, yet shifting back always to that black-stockinged horse.

And then suddenly Sandy's whole attention was jerked away from that horse and toward the door of the Chinaman's restaurant. The blood rushed through his veins in answer to the sudden pump of his heart; his fingers, his toes, the small of his back, seemed fairly to tingle.

Dale Jackson had come out of the Chinaman's and was walking carelessly back toward his horse.

AT sight of him Sandy had instinctively paused; now he began to walk again, lifting his feet high, scarcely realizing even that he was doing so. He had tilted forward on his toes, his head had thrust forward, his shoulders had sunk—all this instinctively, without one thought of how or why he did it. Yet every movement had been to shift into a tenser, more eager posture, to bring his finger tips so that they swung just over the butt of his holstered gun as he walked.

He was within twenty feet before Dale Jackson, hearing the footsteps behind him, glanced around. Dale Jackson's mouth and eyes opened ludicrously.

"I'm here, Dale," said Sandy simply.

Apparently the other could not believe his eyes. "Huh— What—?" he stammered foolishly.

"I'm here," repeated Sandy. "I got a note sayin' somethin' about sundown. Well, it's just about sundown—and here I am. An' I come to slap the face of the fellow that wrote that note, an' was too scared to sign it."

He started forward again, right hand unconsciously starting upward.

Whether it was the threat, or the fact of that right hand being further from the holstered Colt, that stung Dale Jack-

son out of his stupor, Sandy did not know. But suddenly Dale jumped, let out a yell. "Ike! Horse-Trader! It's Sandy—Sandy McLeod! Come here—quick!" At the same instant he snatched downward for his own Colt, whipped it out and up. And with the spurt of flame and smoke a whining bee hurtled past Sandy's ear—hurtled and stung as it passed.

At that sting all the haze, all the feeling of unreality, passed from Sandy's brain like fog blown before a gale. His hand swung down, snatched at the worn walnut protruding from his own holster. Hardly had it cleared leather when the muzzle whipped up and belched its blast of lead and flame and smoke. A second time he fired, even before he realized that, with his first shot the red-headed young cowboy had slumped down on the dusty planks underfoot.

Whether the other was dead or disabled, Sandy had no time to decide. From the open stable door three men poured out. From the Rawhide saloon just across the street from the stable, another man came running. Sandy knew him for Ike Sarles, a cousin of the Jacksons, and he had the barkeeper's, sawed-off shotgun in his hands.

Two of the three men who had rushed from the stable had pulled guns and were firing already. The third, big, gaunt, black-browed Horse-Trader Jackson, oddly enough had not drawn his Colt.

Even with the pistol bullets whining around his ears, Sandy was not forgetful of Ike Sarles. At that range a sawed-off shotgun would cut a man down like a mowing scythe. And at that range Sarles could not miss—all he had to do was to throw the muzzle in Sandy's general direction and pull the triggers.

WITHOUT consciously aiming, Sandy whirled and shot. The heavy Colt jerked in his hand just as the muzzle of the shotgun swung toward him. Sandy expected to feel the heavy buckshot blasting him from his feet—and was surprised when Sarles suddenly stumbled and fell backward as if kicked in the face by a horse. As he fell, the shotgun in his hands crashed against the ground, jumped twice as both barrels went off, tearing a hole in the dirt street.

One of the two men running forward from the direction of the stable stopped and cried out: "Git him! Git him, somebody! He's killed Dale—and now he's got Ike! Can't somebody kill that damn McLeod . . ."

Sandy answered the plaintive yell with a shot fired directly at it. The man who had yelled seemed to stumble, too, but only momentarily; then he whirled and tumbled across the sidewalk and around the corner of a store, cursing as he rolled: "The dirty son-of-a-buzzard! Damn him! Git him, Horse-Trader! Git him, won't you?"

"Then drag outa the way so I can see him!" answered the deep sonorous voice of Horse-Trader Jackson. And Sandy saw then that he had moved over to the nervous white stockinged horse and was pulling out a rifle from the boot under the left stirrup leather. Sandy shifted toward him and sent the last two bullets in his Colt winging as fast as his thumb could jerk the hammer back and let it go.

Horse-Trader did not fall. But even if Sandy's bullets had not made a direct hit, at least one of them kept Horse-Trader from using the rifle right away. One of the bullets apparently had creased the white-stockinged horse. It reared, broke the halter, and pitching and kicking, plunged around for the middle of the street, knocking the rifleman over as it went.

The other Jackson who had run from the stables, apparently finding his gun empty, had dived behind the ineffectual shelter of a hitching post and was frantically trying to reload.

In the momentary dead silence that followed, Sandy suddenly realized that his Colt was empty. Before he could hope to punch the empty shells out and reload, Horse-Trader Jackson would be

opening up on him with the rifle. And not even a child could miss at that point-blank range.

WITH stark fear clutching at his heart, Sandy whirled and ran. He jerked at his horse's slip knot, grabbed at horn and mane, and was fairly jerked into the saddle as Buck plunged away.

It was only a score of yards to the corner of the post office, but to Sandy it looked like so many miles. He leaned low in the saddle, all but lying down on Buck's neck as he sank his spurs deep. Buck leaped at the unaccustomed cruelty, and then shot forward like an arrow from a bow. Even as he did, something tugged at Sandy's sleeve and went whining on like an angry hornet.

Horse-Trader Jackson had gotten into action at last—standing there in the street, or perhaps kneeling, with his cheek against the smooth walnut of the rifle butt, his eye squinting down the long barrel, his finger tightening on the trigger. Already Sandy could feel the crashing thud of the next heavy bullet smashing its way through his flesh and bones. Instinctively he tried to shrink within himself as if to grow smaller, and with all the power of his knees, swung old Buck almost at right angles and around the corner of the post office. A heavy jolt at the saddle beneath him seemed to fling them both around the corner. Horse-Trader Jackson for his third shot had ranged lower.

With the post office between him and the rifleman, Sandy had a moment's reprieve. And by the time Horse-Trader could run around for another shot, Sandy would be sheltered again by the clump of mesquite that crowned a knoll beyond.

Horse-Trader Jackson was too much of a rifleman to waste useless shots. Where one horse could go, though, others could follow. Looking back ten minutes later as he rode steadily across country, Sandy saw several horsemen swing out of the little clump of buildings that was Buckhannon.

But ten minutes is a long lead, and Buck was a horse who had all the endurance of the buckskin he was named after. When in the dark an hour later Sandy reached the rim of the valley on the south, there was neither sight nor sound of the pursuit.

There was a minute, in the late twilight, he stopped and looked back. Below him lay the valley, hidden by the shadows except where a few pin pricks of light indicated the town and the scattering ranch houses.

A slow crooked grin came over Sandy's face.

The Jacksons had run him out of the valley all right. He was on the run, and he didn't dare stop.

But the Jacksons would remember for a long while that day when they had run the last McLeod out of Buckhannon Valley.

CHAPTER III
Flight

SANDY rode north. South of Buckhannon lay the border—toward the south would be where the Jacksons would expect him to ride.

So Sandy turned north. Up in that direction there was limitless country, all the way to the Canada line. Big mountains, deep valleys, heavy stretches of timber land—places where a man could lose himself for weeks or years.

The Jacksons were not the only things Sandy was fleeing from. There was Sheriff Dan Pickett, too. There had been no witnesses to the street fight that Sandy knew of, except himself and the Jacksons. There was no telling what the Jacksons would swear to—except that it probably would not be the truth. And if they swore out a warrant for Sandy, he knew that Sheriff Dan Pickett would serve that warrant. Uncle Dan Pickett was that sort of sheriff—upholding the law he had sworn to uphold, regardless.

Sandy had no wish to spend months in jail, waiting for trial—with no certainty of how it would come out. Yet he couldn't fire on Uncle Dan Pickett if the sheriff came after him. It was easier and safer all around to put a lot of distance between himself and Buckhannon.

Steadily Buck carried Sandy north through good cattle country, and good sheep country as well.

He was getting into horse country now; part of that same paradise for both bred animals and "broomtails," that stretched all the way to "Horse Heaven" in the west. Sandy liked horses. He had the idea of joining on at one of the ranches in this country up here—the section from which came the best horses that Horse-Trader Jackson had ever brought down to the cow country around Buckhannon.

IT was late afternoon when Sandy stopped at the mouth of a valley that lost itself in a distant notch in the high mountains beyond. From the looks of it, and the faint trail leading that way, Sandy figured that through that valley and notch lay the gateway to the country still further north.

But the main trail that Sandy was following turned here to the west and curved sharply around a small clump of oaks that shut off the view in that direction.

It was nearly night. Sandy knew that in another hour or two he would have to make camp. And the silent valley, with the trees and little gurgling stream running down from it, gave promise of good camping, with plenty of wood for a fire.

But, full of the caution that was becoming a second nature with him now, Sandy turned and rode further along the trail through the oaks before turning off for the night. And just beyond the oaks he drew up sharply.

Here the land sloped gently but steadily away toward well settled country. Sandy could see a few scattered ranch houses in the distance, so small as to seem toys almost with their inevitable setting of trees shading them around. And some half dozen miles off, but clearly visible in that clear air, was a cluster of little buildings—evidently a town.

Sandy hesitated irresolutely for a few moments. He was out of coffee; he needed bacon.

But he knew also that towns in the cow or horse country at night-time take unto themselves five and ten times their usual population by day. Cowboys, sheepherders, horse wranglers — men who were out on the range busy at their work by day, came drifting into town at night for tobacco, for drinks, to buck the tiger at the gambling houses, or just to pass the time with other human beings and to hear any chance news that might be going around. If any rumor had come up from the south of that battle in Buckhannon, some one who had heard it might remember in Sandy something of the young cowboy who had ridden away from there after the fight.

Also Sandy knew from experience that strangers who come drifting in at night seem to bring with them always a peculiar something that makes them subjects for suspicion and watchfulness. Walled cities in ancient times and frontier forts in modern days distrusted pilgrims who travel by night and at sundown their gates were barred to all strangers. Cow towns had no walls nor gates, but the feeling of suspicion and watchfulness toward strangers after dark still persisted. A man who, in the bright daylight, would get no more than a casual glance, after dark would be the cynosure of watchful, speculative eyes wherever he went.

Sandy swung his horse around toward the pleasant valley. Bacon and coffee would have to wait until tomorrow.

And in that moment as he turned, his ears caught the sound of sudden movement close in the trees almost beside him —a sound that set his heart pounding even as he ducked low in his saddle, and jerked his horse around with a strength

that almost sent old Buck on his haunches. Something slapped at Sandy's hat brim, all but knocking the headgear off onto the ground.

"BOOM!" And then a roll of high, mocking laughter. "I skeered you that time, didn't I? Thought somebody had ye, didn't you?"

As out of the brush and into the trail stepped a strange object, Sandy cursed—and then slowly slid his six-gun back into its holster.

From the practical joke and the shrill immature voice Sandy had expected to see some ten or twelve-year-old youngster roll out—a kid that ought to be, and would be, spanked. But Sandy's eyes opened wide as he saw before him an individual with the frame and build of a twenty-four-year old man. Across his forehead ran a great scar, as if a horse had kicked him with an iron-shod hoof.

But the stranger's eyes were childlike and naïve. And his manner was that of a ten-year-old. He laughed again in that high-pitched childish voice. "Hee-hee-hee! I shore skeered you that time, didn't I, mister? You never knowed I was anywhere's around, did ye?"

There was a pathetic eagerness in his wish to be recognized as smart, as being able to hide so thoroughly that even a grown rider had not been able to discover him. Sandy remembered his drawn Colt aimed toward that dark splotch as it reared from the thicket, and his heart thumped as he remembered how nearly he had come to letting the hammer slip from under his thumb.

"Nope—I never had no idea there was anybody anywhere around," he said, smiling friendly. "You sure hid good from me. But aren't you afraid somebody might get so skeered at you throwin' rocks out thataway sometime, that they'll hurt you?"

The other grinned. "That's what Black Jack said—time I jumped out under his hoss and nearly got him th'owed—said he'd skin me alive if I ever did it again. Huh—he's got to ketch me 'fore he skins me, ain't he? Say, Mister, that's a mighty perty hoss you got there? You don't feel like givin' him to me, do you?"

"Giving you—!" Suddenly Sandy caught himself, and laughed. "I can't. If I had another hoss as good, I'd give you this 'un. But this is the only one I got—so I'll have to keep him to ride myself, I reckon. See?"

"That's all right," returned the other carelessly. "Miss Betty's goin' to give me a hoss sometime. Then I can ask her to go ridin'—just like Black Jack does."

Sandy picked up his ears. Here was a way of getting some advance information on the town and the people in it—and from a source that would never have the cunning to lie. "Who's Miss Betty?" he asked.

"She's the purtiest girl ever was," was the sincere answer. "She keeps the postoffice down to Black Rock—an' nigh every wuthless cowboy in the kentry is aimin' for to marry her. But she ain't goin' to marry any of 'em—she's goin' to be my sweetheart; she tol' me so."

There was an earnest worship—a dog-like devotion in the half-wit's eyes—that made Sandy curious immediately as to the unknown girl at the postoffice who had commanded all this affection. And every cowboy in the country aimin' to marry her, too, eh—she must be some good looking.

"What's your name?" suddenly inquired the scar-faced person interestedly. He was fingering Sandy's rifle and saddle boot now. "And where you from?"

"My name's Alec," said Sandy, giving the first part of his real name, but one by which he had never been called. "And I'm just ridin' through. What's your name?"

"Happy," said the scar-faced youth, grinning. "Happy Hopkins. Some o' the cowboys—that damn' Black Jack—calls me Half-Way. But Miss Betty calls me Happy—'cause she says I ain't never got no worries. Some day I'm

goin' to bust Black Jack if he don't quit callin' me 'Half-Way.' Miss Betty, she don't like it."

He had gone around to the other side of Sandy now, and suddenly before Sandy could object he reached up and pulled the Colt out of Sandy's holster. But he only turned it over and over in his hands, looking at it admiringly. "That's a right purty gun, too, Mister Alec—that what you said your name was? Yes, sir, a mighty purty gun. Don't reckon you got another 'un just like it you might give me, have you, Mistuh? I ain't never had a gun."

"This is the only one I've got. I'm sorry, Happy," said Sandy gently. "What would you do with a gun if you had one?"

"Kill that damn Black Jack Morgan," said Happy promptly. "I tol' him I was goin' to kill him some day. An' I will."

"Who's this Black Jack—the fellow you don't seem to like so much?" asked Sandy curiously.

"He's the marshal—Morgan's his name, but everybody calls him Black Jack 'count he's so dark faced."

"An' how come you want to kill him?"

"'Cause he tried to kiss Miss Betty t'other day, an' she didn't like it. I I didn't have a gun, so I bit him—an' he took his Colt out an' knocked me down with the barr'l. That's how come I tol' him I was goin' to kill him some time. But it takes a powerful lot o' bitin' to kill a man. You wouldn't loan me that gun o' yours some time, would you, mister? All I got's this here, but I'm generally purty straight with it."

HE took out from his pocket a curious contraption of string and leather, the like of which Sandy had never seen. From another pocket he brought out a small round rock the size of a chestnut. Fitting it into a leather piece in the middle of the contraption, he let it hang in his hand while he looked around. Down the trail thirty or forty feet was a small dead pine stump, on which was perched a jaybird, cawing raucously.

Suddenly swinging the leather contraption around his head several times so rapidly that it hummed, Happy let go. The smooth pebble, slung out at terrific speed, sung through the air and knocked the jaybird in a huddled clutter of feathers from the stump.

"Busted him," said Happy, with satisfaction—"just like I'm going to bust Black Jack some day."

Sandy looked again at the curious weapon with both interest and respect. "Humph, you don't need a gun, if you can use that thing like that. Knock a man's eye plum' out with it—maybe even kill him if you took him just right in the head. Knock him off his hoss, anyway. Say, what do you call it, anyway?"

Happy grinned proudly. "That's a sling, like the Philippines used in the Bible. Miss Betty made it for me, an' showed me how to use it—but I learnt real good. She says a feller in the Bible named David, not nearly so big as me, kilt a bad man named Goliath, bigger'n Black Jack even, with a sling an' a rock."

He put the sling back in his pocket, looked at the shadows lengthening on the hill. "Say, I got to run. Got to git back to the lv'ry stables to bed the hosses down for the night, or old Lane won't give me my breakfast. You goin' to Black Rock?"

Sandy shook his head. "I'm headin' on north—up through the valley here. That's a pass over the mountains at the far end, ain't it?"

But Happy had stopped and was looking at him keenly. "You ain't a-goin' up *there,* are you?" indicating the valley.

"Yes—why not?" inquired Sandy, curious as to his sudden excitement.

"'Cause—there's a dead man up there," said Happy quickly.

"Dead man . . ."

"Uh-huh. Black Jack's brother, Jesse. Old Man Bowie killed him, two years ago, that time Black Jack and his posse

went after Old Man Bowie for stealin' hosses. They shot old Bowie, but he kilt Jesse Morgan deader'n a crow 'fore they got him. Old Bowie's to the pen'tentary now, but Jesse Morgan he ain't nowhere—he's a-lyin' right there in the valley where they buried him."

"Oh, you mean he's buried there," said Sandy, smiling. "Well, I'm not afraid of him if he's dead and buried two years."

"You ain't?" said Happy, looking at him cunningly. "I ain't neither—not if he *stays* dead an' buried. But Jesse Morgan don't! 'Cause I seen him, a-snoopin' round up there just last night about dark. You wouldn't ketch *me* up there after dark no more—not unless Miss Betty was to ask me to go. I ain't even stayin' here no later—I'm goin' to run all the way back to the stables."

HE turned around and with a last wave back, broke into a trot down the trail and away through the oaks. Going to where he could look down into the valley, Sandy saw him fifteen minutes later far down the trail, still going at the same steady lope.

Slowly, thoughtfully, Sandy turned then and rode up through the mouth of the valley, climbing steadily. There was an old trail here, or what might have once been a regular road only occasionally used now, and Sandy followed that. As he rode he thought on what information Happy had dropped. Lucky for him he'd met the boy.

Besides the pretty girl in the post-office, whom every cowboy in the country wanted to marry, there was Black Jack Morgan, the marshal, evidently a big man and one used to having his way. From Happy's words, Sandy drew a mental picture of a big, domineering brutish sort of man. No one but a man like that would try to kiss a girl against her will—and then strike a half-witted boy with a gun barrel afterward. Black Rock evidently must be a hard sort of town, completely under the control of Marshal Black Jack Morgan, or they wouldn't put up with his treatment of either the girl or the half-wit Happy Hopkins.

Also, this was a country where feuds ran, and evil work by night—rustling, fighting, and such. This very little valley, two years before, had seen the flash of guns and rung with their reports and the curses and yells of warring men. And old Man Bowie had gone to the penitentiary—first shot and then sent there by the dark complexioned marshal, Black Jack Morgan.

As for the ghost — Sandy laughed, especially at the memory of Happy legging it home at full lope so as not to be caught out here after dark. Happy had the mentality of an eight- or ten-year-old boy—and a boy at that age might readily believe in ghosts and see them in any flutter of white at night—a piece of blown rag, a white calf, a sheep. Sandy would not sleep less soundly for all of that.

Suddenly Sandy realized that the trail had opened out into a level clearing, along the edge of which the stream ran singing among its alders. Toward the far side of the clearing stood an old log building. Sandy wondered if this perhaps was a line rider's cabin until, coming nearer, he realized that it was an old barn. And at the same moment his horse, suddenly stopping, made him realize that what in the dusk he had thought was sandy loam, was in reality ashes. Ashes, with bits of charred wood still lying among them.

SANDY swung off, left the reins trailing to ground-tie his horse, and stepped forward to investigate.

It must have been a considerable house that had burned here, for beside the log barn there was an old well with built-up stone curbing under a clump of trees close by. And around the ashes were the remains of two stone and clay chimneys.

The house had been burned just about two years ago. Sandy bent down to estimate closer the approximate age of

a small quaking asp that had sprung up right at the edge of the ashes.

Sandy wondered if this had been Old Man Bowie's ranch house—and if perhaps in that same red night that had brought Jesse Morgan to his death, Old Man Bowie had not holed up here to stand off the posse—a stand-off that had only ended when he had been burned out and had come forth, guns roaring, to meet a disabling bullet and then the penitentiary.

Still pondering over the mystery of it all, Sandy rode past the stone well curb and tree clump and on for the hundred yards or so to the log barn.

Unlike so many ranch double-ended barns with the opening in the middle for the wagon, this had been but a single big square-roomed affair, with an open wagon shed built against the back. The solid log building had but a single door, at the front, made of very heavy planking. Sandy dropped his reins, dismounted, opened the door, and looked in.

Inside there was big clay-floored space where the horses had been kept up. At one end there were evidences that there had been a small room partitioned off, probably for grain or tools. But on the stout log rafters overhead, there had been laid a rough plank ceiling, evidently to make an additional storage place. There was a black trap door opening yawning upward through this ceiling at one end, but no ladder or any sign of one around.

Convinced that the place was long deserted, Sandy took his horse down to the stream and watered it, then staked it out in the deep grass near the old corral for a while. For himself he gathered some sticks and a few charred pieces of the old house to make a fire. These he took inside of the barn and piled under the trap door opening in the rough ceiling. The clay floor would make a good bed for his fire, and the trap door opening would act like a chimney to draw the smoke upward and sift it through the openings between the shakes all along, so that with the door closed no observer outside would even imagine that a man was cooking supper within

Next Sandy unrolled his slicker and took out bacon and a piece of cold bannock he had baked that morning. He built his fire, propped his bread up close to the coals to warm up, and broiled his bacon quickly. Cold water from the stream made up the rest of his evening meal.

Then laying out his blankets, with his saddle at the head and his rifle close alongside, he unbuckled his gun-belt, loosened the Colt in its holster, and laid it close by. Sitting on his blankets, boots off, he smoked a last cigarette while in his mind he reviewed again the events of the day.

CHAPTER IV
Night Attack

THUS engrossed, he did not know himself whence came the slight sound that suddenly riveted his attention. He could not even have told what the sound was—a creak, a rustle, the brush of something moving somewhere. Motionless he sat, straining his eyes and ears for a repetition of the noise. His fingers slid restlessly to the butt of his Colt.

And then before he could gasp, before he could roll aside, before he could even tighten those fingers around the walnut gun butt directly under them, something hurtled out of nowhere and bore him down. Something large and heavy, that fell upon him with crushing weight that knocked the Colt slithering from the holster before he could clutch it; something that wrapped him around, rolled him to his back, and clutched and squeezed at his neck with things that seemed more like talons than human hands.

For a second the surprise all but rendered him helpless. He was as stunned by the suddenness of it, as the

force of it. Almost before he knew it his neck was being crushed under the encircling grasp, he was choking, his body pinned down by the knees of the thing above him.

He threw up his hand instinctively. It touched leather—the leather of boots. He could hear the indrawn breath of the other close in his ear. The thing then at least was human, and alive.

With that sudden realization, as well as his instinctive urge to fight for breath for his panting lungs, he kicked wildly, threshed madly about while with his hands he strove to tear loose the grip that was choking him. But those fingers were like steel, it seemed—thin but locked with an iron clutch around his throat; a clutch that his own frantic struggles seemed but to tighten.

Madly Sandy beat at them, at the head and face of the man on top of him, but the blows seemed to rain harmlessly off the attacker. The only response was a grunt, and a tightening of that throttling clutch. Things began to go black before Sandy's eyes. There was a dull roaring in his ears—his lungs and throat seemed to be on fire. He realized that these were the first signs of approaching unconsciousness.

All at once, in his struggles, his feet found something—the rough logs of the side of the barn toward which he had wriggled in his threshing. With that as leverage he put all his strength into one great heave and roll. He felt the weight on top of him lose his balance, fall off sidewise, the clutch on his throat loosening as it did so.

With a gulp Sandy drew in the fresh air for which his lungs panted. It sent new life and strength in a rushing wave through him. His upheaval had flung his attacker rolling several feet away. In the dim glow from the coals Sandy saw him scramble to his knees, throw himself forward again with outstretched, clutching hands.

But Sandy had determined that those slender, steely fingers should not reach his throat again. Sandy's own arm, upthrust, met that plunging attack in mid air, turned it aside. On his own hands and knees now, Sandy himself lunged, falling on top of the other, pounding at him with fist and elbow, kneeing him as he lay on the other's body.

One of those pounding blows of his fist must have reached home. There was a groan, an indrawn breath. Sandy struck again. He felt the wild panther-like strength suddenly go out of the body under him—a body that seemed amazingly little for such herculean fingers. With renewed confidence as he felt his own strength returning and the other's waning, Sandy battered again, then suddenly grabbed with both hands, found the other's throat and in turn began to throttle.

The steely fingers of the man beneath found Sandy's hands, tried to tear them loose. But the battering had apparently weakened him, or else his previous exertions had worn him down. With his fingers locked, Sandy found himself able to resist those tearing talons and his own weight, on top, was greater, his body as a whole stronger than the other's. And Sandy's legs were nutcracker stronger from clamping down on pitching, bucking broncos, when a man's leg hold was his only salvation. He resisted every effort to roll him in turn. He felt the struggles underneath him growing less. There was an odd choking, gurgling noise now coming from the other's lips. Still Sandy kept up his relentless throttling.

And then another noise sounded directly behind him—a noise so amazing, so unexpected, that Sandy instinctively loosened his grip even before he looked around.

"Stop—stop! You'll kill him! You're choking him—!" cried a distressed excited voice in unmistakable feminine tones.

And looking around, Sandy saw in the door of the barn just a few feet away and lighted by a vagrant flame that had chosen that moment to leap up among the dying embers, the face of a girl—

the face of the prettiest girl he had ever seen.

FOR a full thirty seconds Sandy stared. Then slowly he loosed his hold completely, and scrambled to his feet. "Why—why I wasn't aimin' for to hurt him, m'am," he stammered. "I was just tryin' to keep him from hurtin' *me!*"

It wasn't until then that he realized he was actually apologizing for defending himself from the attack of a midnight stranger who only a few seconds before had been trying to murder him.

The girl, however, was not even listening; she had rushed inside and was bending over the crumpled-up figure of Sandy's late attacker. "Water—quick!" she demanded imperiously. "Give me some water . . ."

Dazed, Sandy handed over his canteen, which she emptied over the face of the unconscious man. Sandy, left alone for a moment, threw a fresh piece of dry wood on the fire which, catching like tinder, flared up and threw the barn's whole interior into a bright light.

Sandy was surprised now, and a little ashamed when he got a better view of his late foe. He was an elderly man, medium sized, and thin even for his frame. There was a pallor about his face in the flickering firelight that seemed unnatural even for a man who has just been choked into unconsciousness. He was dressed in old overalls, wrinkled flannel shirt, and worn boots, and there was a two-day stubble of beard on his thin face. Sandy felt more and more ashamed that he a young and vigorous cowboy, one hundred and eighty pounds of bone and muscle, should have been caught choking an old man like that—until he remembered those steely fingers clamped about his own neck. It was incredible that such a thin, white-faced gent should have such a herculean grip!

And then Sandy's eyes, accustomed to noting details, discovered something else; the unconscious man's grizzled hair was close cropped, almost to the scalp.

Before he could reason out this odd detail, however, the old man gave signs of returning to life. He breathed heavily, grunted, then suddenly caught a deep breath and sneezed. His eyes flew open, and after a dazed look around, he tried to sit up.

"He's all right now, m'am," said Sandy to the girl, with a feeling of relief. "Just a few more deep breaths like that and he'll be all right, I *know*!"

For the first time then since she had so strangely appeared, the girl turned and looked at Sandy. Her eyes flashed—and Sandy figured that he had never seen such flashing black eyes in any other woman in all his life. "Why did you try to kill him?" she demanded. And then, as her eyes traveled over his face and figure in quick inspection, "Who are you? What are you doing here?"

Sandy sat down, and smiled slowly. "M'am, when you come in, I was trying my best to keep from being choked to death by your old friend there. I was settin' here, smokin', not knowing there was anybody else within a dozen miles, when all at once he came bounding out o' nowhere's and fastened onto me and set in to choke the life outa me. Naturally, I couldn't figure to let myself be choked thataway. So I—well, you saw how it was. I was intendin' only to choke him 'til I could tie him up, though, m'am."

But her eyes did not cease their angry flashing. "You aren't from Black Rock," she said. "What were you doing here?"

"Just campin' for the night, m'am, on my way through," said Sandy. He was beginning to enjoy looking at her now that she was apparently losing a little of her anger. She was worth looking at with her dark eyes, wavy hair, red lips and slender, wiry figure.

"You didn't come here—stop here on purpose?" she shot at him sharply. And seemingly she listened for the answer as if a great deal depended on it.

Sandy shook his head. "No'm; just ridin' up from the south, and this looked like a good place to stop. Quiet, and restful, and nobody around. Just figured to camp here tonight, and ride on tomorrow, after I bought some coffee and fixin's in that town down there, tomorrow mornin'."

There was no doubt of the relief that his answer had given her. She glanced quickly at the older man who was sitting up and likewise listening interestedly. Strangely enough there didn't seem to be a particle of antagonism in the old man's face as he looked at his late and successful adversary. For the first time he opened his mouth.

"I believe him," he said simply. "I never seen him before, either."

Again the mysterious exchange of glances between girl and old man. Sandy following her glance, again caught sight of that close-cropped hair on the older man's head. Where did they crop hair as close as that—?

And then he suddenly had it. An old man — close-cropped hair — hiding out here, attacking from the dark an utter stranger who merely happened to be passing through.

HE faced the girl full, poked the fire up so that the light would fall better on both his face and theirs, and smiled. "M'am, don't you get worried now, but I bet I can tell you what's at the bottom of this whole chokin' match of ours—and furthermore, though I never saw him before in all my life, I'll bet the name of this gent here is Jim—old man Jim Bowie!"

There was a second of tense silence; then the girl broke out with a half scream. "Oh, you do know! You did come after Uncle Jim! That's what you're here for . . ."

The older man merely nodded resignedly. "Well, there ain't no use worryin', honey. He's got me, and I can't git away. But I'll git away again some time —they can't hold me down there—and I'll be back. Back to take care of the whole hanged business—though I was hopin' to take care of Black Jack, at least, this time."

Sandy smiled again, oddly. "I'm not here to take your uncle back to no penitentiary, m'am. I'm just ridin' through, I tell you."

"You're not—after him?" The girl breathed the words incredulously. "Then who are you? Where are you from?"

"My name's Alec," said Sandy. "Alec McLeod—from down south, three, four hundred miles from here. And one reason why your Uncle Jim don't have to worry about me taking him back to the penitentiary, is 'cause I'm maybe wanted, too. Your Uncle Jim ain't the only wanted man—there's maybe two wanted men in this here barn, right now."

AND very simply he told them the story of the battle in Buckhannon, and how he had left with the bullets of the vengeful Jacksons flying after him. When he had finished, old Jim Bowie told his story.

"What the Jacksons did to you, Black Jack Morgan and his gang tried to do to me. Only they tried it different here. There'd been horses missin' around here two, three years, till people everywhere begun to get their dander up about it. They begun to say Black Jack, bein' marshal, had better do somethin' about it—or let somebody else be marshal that could. A week after that they found a coupla horses that had been stole off the Bar J, in my corral here — only I didn't put 'em there. The fust I knew about 'em bein' there was when Jesse Morgan found 'em. An hour later him and Black Jack and some more come out from town to arrest me."

He stopped for a moment and then went on. "They didn't get me till they burned me out—and at that, I got Jesse Morgan first. Black Jack wanted to string me up then and there, but the others with him wouldn't let him. So they sent me off to the pen'tentiary."

"But why should any one put stolen horses in your corral?" inquired Sandy.

"'Cause they had to arrest somebody for stealin'. And furthermore this place of mine, bein' here in the valley an' right across the trail up through the gap in the mountains north o' here, sorter stands guard on everybody comin' and goin' that way. I sorter figure the people that was runnin' the hosses off would like to git hold of this place—give 'em just a clean getaway to the north with stuff from 'round here—and to the south with stuff they were getting away with from outfits up north. Just a reg'lar underground railroad, this trail here is, for them that knows it. An' I figure that same Black Jack is one of them."

"You mean the marshal is running off the horses?" Sandy asked in surprise.

"Wouldn't be the first time it's been done. And bein' marshal just naturally makes him the last person one 'ud suspicion in a case like this. I got to thinkin' though when his brother Jesse was the first one to find them stolen horses in my little brandin' corral up the trail from here. And I knew there hadn't been no horses there the night before. Furthermore Black Jack an' Jesse always seemed to have plenty of money to spend over the bar an' at the dance halls here.

"An' lastly, Black Jack is always hobnobbin' with purty hard looking strangers which drifts through Black Rock occasional, and which he lets on is law officers lookin' for wanted men—but which looked a lot more like hoss-thieves themselves, to my way of thinkin'. Ain't it so, Betty?" He turned to the girl.

SHE nodded. And Sandy suddenly remembered other things that Happy Hopkins had told him. "Are you Happy's Miss Betty?" he asked boldly.

The girl smiled. "Did you meet Happy? I'm Betty Bowie, all right—but he always calls me Miss Betty. He claims I'm his sweetheart—poor thing."

"He also allowed that every cowboy in the country was set on marryin' you," said Sandy, grinning. "You see, I know all about you, already."

The girl flushed. "I'll have to scold Happy about that," she said. "He was kicked in the head by a horse when he was a small boy—and he's never grown up since. He's harmless, but some of the men treat him almost brutally—just because he doesn't think as other people do."

"He shore thinks a lot of you," said Sandy—"and there ain't nothing crazy about it that I can see." He looked at the girl so steadily and admiringly that she blushed again and dropped her eyes. Feeling a little ashamed himself at embarrassing her, Sandy turned back to Bowie.

"But aren't you afraid they'll come here looking for you?" he inquired. "The first place they'd look, when they found you'd broke out of the penitentiary, would be somewhere around your old home."

But the old man with the grizzled hair shook his head and chuckled. "They don't know I got away. They think they got me. There was two of us made the break together—me, and a feller named Tom Tryon that was sent up from the south o' the state for killin' a sheepherder. Me and Tom was about the same height and size. Well, the guard saw us just as we jumped into the bushes, and he took a shot at us, and hit Tom.

"I managed to get him away on a horse I picked up, but the wound went bad—it took poison, somehow, and poor Tom didn't pull through. It wouldn't hurt him, poor devil, and it would help me—so after he died I changed clothes and all with him, and even left him my belt and my watch that they'd let me keep in the pen, and some other little things. I knew they'd find Tom, and they did, but not soon enough to recognize him. So they ain't lookin' for me. They think they've done buried me and they're settin' around Tryon's place down south, waitin' for Tom to come sneakin' in. He won't never come."

"But why did you jump on me from the dark?" asked Sandy. "I never would have known you were anywhere around."

Old Man Bowie glanced up at the opening in the ceiling and grinned. "You smoked me out, durn ye. When you built that fire under that hole the smoke just went right up and filled that whole place up there before it leaked out through the shakes. I had to sneeze or bust or jump ye—so I jumped ye."

Sandy looked at the smoke drifting upward and grinned too. "What are you figuring on doing now?"

A look of deadly determination came over the older man's face. "I'm going to hide out here until I get the proof on that Black Jack Morgan for doing the stealing they sent me up for—that or something else. And then I'm going in and walk up to him and shoot him down just like the dog he is. After that I don't care what they do to me."

"No, no!" cried Betty Bowie; she turned beseechingly to Sandy. "Don't let him do it. Black Jack will kill him—he's fast with a gun—and he's a killer! And Uncle Jim is older—and—and he's been in prison, and out of practice with guns. He wouldn't have a chance with Black Jack."

"Humph!" grunted the older man. "There wasn't a day in the pen'ten'tary I wasn't thinkin' about Black Jack, and when I'd meet him again. Every day I used to practice, with a piece of wood I stuck in the belt of my overalls—keepin' my fingers limber just for the day when I'd meet Black Jack. And, not bein' sure I'd have a gun, maybe, I practiced so's I could choke him to death if I had to. Used to twist and untwist the blankets on my bed to get my fingers good and strong."

Remembering the terrific grip of those steely fingers, Sandy could well imagine him throttling even an unusually large man. But practicing pulling a gun from a holster, and using a little bit of stick for that gun—that was something else again. The weight and shape of the two things were so utterly different. And also Bowie had passed the day of his greatest speed already. His muscles must have begun to stiffen, to slow down, to lose that resiliency and smooth co-ordination of youth.

THE girl stood up, turned toward the door. "Well, I must go now, before they begin to wonder at Doctor Underwood's where I am. I brought you some flour and sugar. It's out in my saddle bags now." She turned to Sandy, explaining: "Uncle Jim got word to me he was here, when he reached here a week ago. I've been coming up since then whenever I could sneak off safely, and bringing him what food I could hide on my saddle. I'll be glad to bring some for you too, whenever I can."

Sandy shook his head. "Thanks, m'am. I was going to ride into town tomorrow morning anyway. I want to look around a bit; maybe find a place for a job where it'll be safe. I don't reckon there's any news about me come up this way. It's pretty far from Buckhannon."

"No, I'm sure there hasn't, yet," answered the girl. "You see I run the postoffice, and that's where they always put up the reward notices when they come in. If they'd had out a notice for you, and sent one here, I'd have seen it first thing."

Sandy walked out with her while she went to her saddled pony to get the food she had brought. It was while she was unlashing the straps that suddenly she stopped, put her hand on Sandy's arm. "What—what's that?"

Sandy too had heard the noise, and was turning to listen.

It came from up the valley—not toward town but from the opposite direction, toward the distant gap. Then it became plainer—the trample of hoofs, the occasional voices of men speaking in subdued tones.

"I reckon we'd better get back inside with our horses, too," said Sandy quietly. "We wouldn't want anybody

to see us out here. If you'll lead your pony inside the barn, I'll get old Buck and be right along after you."

By the time he had joined her, holding his horse's nose so it would not whinny, Betty Bowie was already in the barn, likewise holding her pony. Sandy stepped inside and pulled the door after them. Old Jim Bowie had already thrown a pan of water on the fire, completely extinguishing it.

FOR five minutes they remained thus. The mysterious riders outside came down the trail, past the barn within a few feet, and on by the old burned house in the center of the clearing. From where they were inside the barn, Sandy and the others could not see who or how many the riders were, or what they were about. But from the voices, talking low enough so as to be all but indistinguishable, Sandy judged there must be four or five riders, with a great many more horses.

Once he heard the single word "horses" and then the word "North Fork," but what they meant he could not puzzle out. But in the very fact of the riders in the night, and the low tones in which they were speaking, whereas ordinarily cowboys would be calling out to each other, joking, grumbling over their work, there seemed to be something dark, insidious. It seemed to Sandy that here again was something quite in keeping with the evil spirits that had dominated this quiet valley.

For twenty minutes after the strange cavalcade had passed, Sandy kept the girl inside. Then at last he opened the door again. "I reckon it's safe to go now. But I'm goin' to ride with you as far as the oak clump at the mouth of the valley, where the road drops down to Black Rock." And accompany her that far he did, despite her protests.

At the clump, however, he drew rein. The girl did likewise, and held out her hand. "Thank you, Mister—Mister McLeod. I trust you, and know you will look out for Uncle Jim as much as you can. Come in and see me tomorrow when you're in town, but be careful they don't think we have seen each other before."

"They won't," said Sandy. "And by the way, my name's Alec—though all my friends call me Sandy."

"Thank you—I'll remember—Sandy," said she, letting go his hand. "And my friends call me Betty."

"I'll look for you tomorrow—Betty," said Sandy.

She turned then and rode off down the trail toward the cluster of lights that indicated Black Rock. Sandy watched her until she was out of sight. Then he too turned and rode off, back to the old barn where Jim Bowie waited.

CHAPTER V
Twice Framed

IT had been arranged that when Sandy went into Black Rock the next day he should call at the postoffice and ask if there was any mail for Alec Moore, when Betty Bowie, if she had any message for her uncle, would give it to Sandy, pretending it to be his mail.

But before he left, Sandy and Jim Bowie had a long talk.

"If the hoss-stealing that I was accused of has still been goin' on durin' the two years I was in the pen'ten'tary," said the old man, "it's goin' to have a lot of people wonderin' if somebody else wasn't doing it all the time. And once get 'em started to thinkin', it won't be so hard to figure out next that maybe it was Black Jack Morgan and his gang behind it. Now there's two honest people down to Black Rock that would know what's been going on, if anybody does. One's old Doc Underwood, and the other's Joe Lane that keeps the livery stable. They're both in a position to know more what's goin' on, and who's goin' and comin' than any ten men outside. Furthermore I got reason to believe neither of 'em ever believed I stole

them hosses the Morgans said I did. If you could get to talk to them . . ."

"I'll try to do it when nobody else is around," said Sandy. "It won't do to get people wondering what business a stranger like me has with them."

"That's right," said the older man nodding. "If you get a chance to talk to 'em alone, you whisper for 'em to come up here by theirselves—tell 'em there's somebody wants to see 'em. I don't believe they'll turn me over to the law once I get a chance to talk with them."

ACCORDINGLY when Sandy rode into Black Rock in the middle of the afternoon, he went first to the little postoffice. Differing from so many cow towns, wherein the postoffice was just a corner of the general store, the postoffice in Black Rock was a separate building, between the two general stores and across from the livery stable. Tying old Buck to the hitchrack in front of the stable, and crossing the street, Sandy entered the postoffice, walked up to the window and asked for any mail for "Alec Moore."

The girl was waiting at the window for him, but her face was flushed with excitement. "Yes, there's a package for you, Mr. Moore," she said hurriedly. "Come around to the side door, and I'll give it to you."

But when Sandy presented himself at the side door which she had opened, she drew him hurriedly inside and closed the door. She snatched a paper from the bosom of her blouse.

"You've got to get out of town—quick!" she said. "It came this morning—this notice. Marshal Morgan tacked it up on the wall out there, but I tore it down the minute nobody was looking. But some of them may have read it and remembered—they might recognize you if you stayed around!"

Sandy's eyes opened wide as he unfolded the paper.

"$500— Dead or Alive!" the notice offered, "for Alexander (Sandy) McLeod. On May 8th, he shot and killed from ambush Sheriff Dan Pickett who was seeking to arrest him on a charge of manslaughter. This man is young and desperate and will shoot with little or no provocation. On the same day (May 8th), McLeod killed a bartender, Ike Sarles, and wounded two other men in a street fight in Buckhannon . . ."

Then followed a complete and accurate description of Sandy, even to the slanting scar behind his ear where he had fallen off a corral fence in his early boyhood.

The notice was signed with the name of William Jackson, temporary deputy sheriff, Buckhannon County, Arizona.

SANDY suddenly let out a little cry of rage and grief. "Uncle Dan—they've murdered Uncle Dan! They dry-gulched him—and now they've laid the murder to me! I'll get the Jacksons for that if it's the last thing I do on this earth!"

The girl listened sympathetically. "I knew you couldn't have done a murder—not and told it all the way you did last night," she said. "I was watching you—and if you had lied I would have known. But who is this sheriff William Jackson?"

"That's Horse-Trader's brother—the slick one of the Jacksons," said Sandy bitterly. "He lives in town and buys up mortgages and does the money part of the Jacksons' business. Uncle Dan Pickett wasn't a McLeod, but the Jacksons knew they'd have to get him out of the way before they could ever control Buckhannon valley complete. Now they've done it—and laid the blame on me for the killing. Why I'd as soon shot my own father as let loose a bullet at Uncle Dan Pickett!"

"But how is it that a man like this Jackson ever got to be a deputy sheriff?" demanded the girl. "Surely the people wouldn't put up with a man like that!"

"They put up with Black Jack Morgan for marshal here, don't they?" said Sandy. "It's the same way down there.

The Jacksons have the whole valley under their thumbs. There's honest people a-plenty, but they don't dare speak up because the Jacksons are gunmen and fast on the trigger. Nobody's life would be safe that tackled 'em single-handded."

"Then why don't the honest ones get together and run all the Jacksons out of the country?"

"They will some day—when they get properly roused," said Sandy. "But until then they'll stand for 'em, because it's safer, just like Black Rock stands for the Morgans. But they'll pay for it sooner or later—I'll promise that much for Uncle Dan."

He struck a match and burned the reward notice to crushed cinders. Then he started out.

Betty Bowie reached out and caught his arm. "You're going to get out of town right away? You won't be safe anywhere here."

But Sandy shook his head. "Probably not many people read it yet, and they can't be sure of the description. And anyway I got business here—something for your Uncle Jim. After that's all 'tended to, I'll be ridin'—south to 'tend to some business with the Jacksons!"

FROM the postoffice, Sandy moved on to the general store to buy his supplies. After that he intended to get a look at the notorious Black Jack Morgan, if possible, and eventually try to manage a quiet talk with both Doctor Underwood and the stable proprietor.

In the store, there was a man ahead of him, apparently, buying plug tobacco, and very particular tobacco, too. He tried several kinds, smelled them, even took thumb-nail pinches to taste, before he finally decided on one kind and bought a plug.

He was a blue-eyed stocky-built man of fifty or thereabouts, dressed in blue overalls and cowman's boots. Seating himself on an unbroached nail keg, he took out his knife and began lazily to whittle thin slices from the plug into his pipe.

The white bearded storekeeper turned to Sandy. "Somethin' you want, Buddy?" he inquired, looking Sandy over interestedly as one might any stranger.

"Coffee," said Sandy, turning away to look at the cans on the shelves to keep the storekeeper from getting too long a look at his face.

"Bacon, sugar—" he rattled off the list of needed supplies.

All these the storekeeper leisurely got together, moving in his slow, unhurrying fashion. He finally had them all in one pile, added up the prices, and announced the total. "You're a stranger here, ain't you?" he asked curiously, as Sandy pulled the change from his pockets.

"Yes," said Sandy, shortly. "Just riding through. Though I thought I might look around for a job on some of the ranches, maybe, around here."

"Looking for a job—?" For the first time the man on the keg took part in the conversation. "You good with hosses? That buckskin hoss out there yours? He looks pretty well took care of—looks like a pretty good hoss."

"Yes, he's mine," said Sandy noncommittally. He didn't want a job—it had just been casual talk to quell suspicion.

But the whittler still persisted. "You had him long? He looks to be five, six six years old."

"Six years," said Sandy. "Well, I got to be shovin' along. You ain't got a doctor here that pulls teeth, too, have you? I got a turrible bad tooth in the right side of my jaw—been achin' to beat the devil. If you could tell me . . ." He grinned wryly as if with pain.

"I can tell you plenty," said the storekeeper at Sandy's side. "First thing is, Git your hands up! And the second is, Keep 'em up—if you don't want me to blow your backbone out through your stummick. This scattergun's got mighty tender triggers!"

AND to Sandy's utter surprise, the storekeeper who had apparently been carelessly leaning on the counter, suddenly shoved a sawed-off shotgun across the counter and jammed the muzzle into Sandy's stomach. At the same time, the storekeeper's thumbs pulled both hammers back to full cock.

The surprise had been complete. Still dazed at the unexpectedness of it all. Sandy raised his hands in obedience to that threatening gun-muzzle, which could have blown him to bits before his own fingers could have even touched the butt of his holstered Colt.

The blue-eyed stocky man on the nail keg leisurely arose, put knife, pipe and tobacco away, and strolled forward. "Much obliged, Hank," he said, as he reached forward and deftly removed Sandy's Colt from its holster. "I'll take him now— And young feller, you better not try to run if you know what's good for you. I don't miss much with this." As he spoke he had pulled a heavy six-shooter out of the waistband of his overalls, and swung the muzzle around to cover Sandy.

"You're welcome, Joe. Wasn't no trouble at all," said the storekeeper, calmly putting away the shotgun. His only sign of excitement was the quivering of his white beard at the corners of his mouth. "I reckon we got his fangs pulled now."

"But—but what's the idea?" Sandy had suddenly come out of his daze. "What are you pulling a gun on me for?" He realized with a sinking heart that one of these men must have read the reward notice and recognized him. But he would bluff it out if he could. They wouldn't have the notice to check up by, for several days at least. "I haven't done anything; I told you I was just ridin' through."

"Yeah?" The blue-eyed man's voice was softly sarcastic. "You also told us that buckskin hoss out there was yours —that you'd had him for six years." Still keeping his eyes on Sandy, he spoke out of the corner of his mouth to the storekeeper: "Better go fetch Black Jack, Hank—though this is the first time I ever knowed a hoss-thief fool enough to ride a hoss right back into the very town he stole it from."

"Horse-thief—!" Sandy gaped again, with the shock of this new surprise. "I didn't steal Buck. Why I've had him almost from the time he was a colt. You must be mistaken—mistook Buck for some other hoss."

"I might be, only I ain't," said the stocky man decisively. "I know that hoss, 'cause I bred him. And I'd know him again if it was twenty-five years from then, instead of only six. An' when the marshal comes, I'll prove it."

THE marshal was already coming. He entered the store with the white-bearded storekeeper trotting after him. Right away with instinctive dislike, Sandy recognized this as Black Jack Morgan.

Black Jack was a big man—big even as Horse-Trader Jackson, down in Buckhannon, and almost as dark skinned and brutal looking. There was a bullying sneer about his mouth. The eyes under his beetling brows were hawklike and predatory. He swaggered as he walked.

"So you caught one of 'em cold, did you?" he asked in a loud hoarse voice. "Good! Well, I'll just take care of him now, Joe, I'll put him in a cell where he'll keep plenty good till we decide what to do with him. I guess now you'll be willing to admit I was right five years ago when I said there was a regular gang working this end of the state for hosses."

"Yeah—but two years ago you said it was Jim Bowie," said the stocky man brusquely. "Well, this hoss-thief shore ain't Jim Bowie."

"But I tell you I didn't steal that horse," said Sandy desperately. "There's plenty of buckskin horses. And just like this man here says, I'd be crazy, if I had stolen him, to ride him right back into the town I stole him from."

"Just the same that's my hoss. I'll prove it." The stocky man turned to one of the several men who had come crowding in on the marshal's heels, agape with curiosity. "One of you boys go out there and untie that buckskin hoss. Fasten the reins back on his saddle so he won't step on 'em." Then when they had done so he suddenly let out a shrill whistle.

To Sandy's amazement, at the first whistle, Buckskin, whom he had ridden for years, threw up his head, with pointed ears, as if trying to locate the direction of that shrill whistle. At the second whistle, Buck turned and trotted straight across the street, trying to nuzzle into the pocket of the stocky blue-eyed man who had stepped out to meet him.

"That proves it, don't it?" said the stocky man. "Taught him that trick when he was a colt. His Maw died and we had to bring him up on a bottle. Made a reg'lar pet out of him. Taught him to come when I whistled, and steal sugar out of my pockets. I didn't need that to recognize him, though. Hank here recognized him too."

Sandy was dismayed. There was no doubt of the stocky man's statement. "I tell you I didn't steal him though," he said. "I come by him honest—my father bought him when he was just a colt. I can prove it—there was a bill of sale . . ."

"Well," said the stock man, "all you got to do is send down and get that bill of sale. Likely there'd be people who'd back up your word, too, if it's like you say. Whereabouts is this place you come from, where you got a bill of sale for this hoss and all?"

Then Sandy's heart suddenly sank within him. He could get the bill of sale for Buck; he knew it was in his father's papers, in Dan Pickett's house where they had been moved for safe keeping. But if he wrote for it, or for any word to back his testimony, it would be jumping out of the frying pan into the fire; swapping a charge of horse-stealing for one of murder. Horse-Trader and the Jacksons would be up here with papers, to carry him back on that framed up charge for murder.

He dropped his head hopelessly. "I didn't steal him—we bought him—but I can't prove it," he said.

"All right, then; come on to jail," said the brutal-faced marshal.

A few minutes later the cell door had clanged behind Sandy.

CHAPTER VI
Jailed

THE jail was a little brick building consisting of only a couple of cells and the marshal's office in front, but the single window and the door of each cell was barred with strong steel. He had been searched, and his pocket knife as well as what little money he had was now in the drawer of the marshal's desk, while his gunbelt and holstered Colt hung from a nail on the wall.

The marshal had gone out again, but his deputy, a sullen-faced individual with apparently more brawn than brains stayed in the office to act as jailer.

It was only after he had time to think, in the quietness of his cell, that Sandy began to put two and two together. The man who had claimed ownership of the buckskin had been called "Joe" by the marshal. And also he kept a livery stable. Then—then this must be the very Joe Lane that Bowie had told him to look up and give the message to!

Sandy's reaction was prompt. He shook the cell door and called, until the dour faced deputy came.

"What'ya want?" rasped the deputy.

"I want to see Mr. Lane—the man that said I stole his horse," said Sandy.

"Want to try to square yourself, huh? Well, it won't work. People 'round here are tired of havin' their hosses stole. You'll be lucky if you live to come to trial."

However, on Sandy's earnest protes-

tations that he had important disclosures to make, but would only make them to the livery stable owner in confidence, the deputy at last consented to have the man sent for. Ten minutes later the livery stable owner strode into the jail.

"So you want to see me?" he said as he came to Sandy's cell door and stood on the other side of the bars. "Willing to tell all you know about that hoss, huh?"

"Yes," said Sandy boldly. "But just to you confidential." He looked meaningly at the deputy. The latter was inclined to demur, but at a sharp word from the stable-owner, who was evidently a person of importance in the town, the deputy at last slouched out into the front office.

"Now what is it?" asked the stable-owner, coming close up to the bars. "Speak out—and talk straight talk, if you want me to do anything for you. You ain't old enough to be the boss of this horse-stealing gang, I know—but if you tell enough so we can get the main ones, we'll see that you get off a whole lot easier."

"All right," said Sandy, lowering his voice. "I'll tell you something important—I have a message for you about Jim Bowie!"

"What—?" In spite of himself, the stable-man raised his voice in surprise. Then at Sandy's whispered caution he lowered his voice again. "What about Jim Bowie? You needn't try to tell me Jim had anything to do with your hoss-stealing!"

"Jim Bowie never had anything to do with *any* horse-stealing," said Sandy. "Maybe instead of saying I had a message for you about Jim Bowie, I ought to have said I had a message for you *from* Jim Bowie!"

"From Jim Bowie? But Jim Bowie's dead! Killed trying to make his getaway from state prison."

"No, he ain't! He's alive and kicking. I saw him no later than this morning," said Sandy earnestly. "He's on the dodge—hiding out."

THE stable owner looked at Sandy keenly, suspiciously. "How do I know you are not telling me a lie—working some deep game to get away, somehow? What's all this got to do with your own case, for instance? You can't get around the fact that you came into town riding a stolen hoss!"

"Mister Lane," said Sandy earnestly. "I come by that hoss honest—never knew he was stole. I could get the bill of sale from down where I come from, maybe, and anyway get plenty of folks who knew we bought that hoss honest—but you see I don't dare."

"Don't dare? Why don't you?"

"Because," said Sandy frankly. "I'm a wanted man down there. I killed a man and shot up one or two more in a street fight—that was five to one against me. But the other side just about runs the county there. Then they framed me for murderin' the sheriff himself, who was the best friend I ever had. I told Jim Bowie I'd help him, but as soon as that's finished I'm going back down there and get them Jacksons for killing Uncle Dan, if it's the last thing on earth I do!"

There was something so convincing in Sandy's quiet yet determined words that the old stable-man listened in spite of himself.

"Where's old Jim Bowie hiding out?" he asked quickly.

"Do you believe he's innocent?" countered Sandy, before making further answer.

"Yes—I don't know about you, but I always knew old Jim Bowie never was no hoss-thief. Why me and that old hairpin used to chase sheep together when they tried to bring the damned woolies into this valley forty years ago! Where's the old peeler hiding? You can bet he'll never come to no harm from me—and after I see him, if he backs up your yarn about why you're up here, why I'll see what can be done for you."

"He's hiding out in the loft of his old barn in the clearing where they caught

him two years ago," said Sandy. "Take off your hat and wave it 'fore you go up close—he ain't fixing to get caught alive again, and he might not recer'nize you right off. He wants to see old Doc Underwood, too. You might take him along with you when you go."

"I'll take Doc, all right," said the stable-owner. "Me and Doc have been figurin' for some time on tryin' to see who really was behind all the stealin' 'round here. We knew it wasn't Jim Bowie—and anyway it's been goin' on right along ever since Bowie's been in jail up there. By the way, what'd you say was the name of them tough riders down there that smoked you out? Jacksons, was it?"

"Jacksons—there's half a dozen of 'em," said Sandy. "Dale, and Bob and William and Steve and Frank, and Allen—though they generally call Allen 'Hoss-Trader,' account he buys and sells horses."

"Jacksons, huh?" The stable-keeper's voice was reflective. "Knowed I'd heard it somewhere. Some of 'em have been in here a few times—buyin' hosses and stock from Black Jack Morgan. He does a little hoss-tradin' hisself, on the side. Well, I got to go now—I'll try to pick up Doc and get out to Jim as quick as I can. I'll see you again when I come back."

HE was gone, leaving Sandy to mull again over this new information the stable-keeper had given him.

So the Jacksons—Horse-Trader Jackson—had been up here, too, had he? Well, everybody in Buckhannon knew the Jacksons worked the country a good way, both north and south, picking up bargains in horseflesh. Naturally enough for him to get up here. But this was the place Buck had come from—been stolen . . .

And suddenly Sandy gave a grunt of surprise. He had it! The McLeods had bought old Buck from Sheriff Dan Pickett. But Sheriff Dan Pickett, like almost everybody else down there, had undoubtedly bought the horse himself from the Jacksons. Then the Jacksons, either they had bought him from the thief or else they had stolen him themselves!

It was almost as if his unspoken thoughts conjured up the very thing they were mulling on. Sandy heard the front door of the marshal's office open, heard footsteps, the sound of voices. And some of those voices sounded oddly familiar.

"I tell you it's gettin' dangerous! We've been lucky for four, five years. But a man's luck can't keep up forever!"

It was the gruff voice of Black Jack Morgan that spoke, but it was one of the oddly familiar voices that answered derisively.

"Aw, you're getting cold feet, Black Jack. Why it's just gettin' easier, now. Jim Bowie fixed it for us for two whole years, so we didn't even get suspected. Now this new fellow, he'll fix it for us for two years more. Perk up, Black Jack. Get a little sand in your craw. And now take me out and let me see what this new horse-thief of yours looks like."

"All right," said the marshal heavily. "Wait till I light the lamp." There was the sound of a match being struck. A few seconds later the men who had been talking in the marshal's office came through the door and down the little hallway that led into the cells. And as the second one came into sight, following the hulking form of the marshal, Sandy knew why that voice had sounded familiar.

The man behind the marshal was Horse-Trader Jackson! And the third man was Dale Jackson, the redhead he had started the fight with in Buckhannon weeks before.

THERE was no use trying to hide in the shadowy corners of the cell. Sandy knew from the immediate flash of recognition on the Jacksons' faces that they had seen him.

"So this is your horse-thief!" said Horse-Trader with a great laugh. "Why, Black Jack, you have showed brains this time. Pure fool's luck! And you come out five hundred dollars the richer for it."

"Five hundred dollars—?" said the slower-witted marshal.

"Yes." Again Horse-Trader laughed. "Why don't you know who this is you're entertaining, Black Jack? This is Alexander, otherwise 'Sandy' McLeod, for whose body delivered at Buckhannon dead or alive, you can collect five hundred dollars. However did you catch him—creep up on him asleep?"

Evidently the derisive tones with their insinuations at possible lack of courage by the marshal did not sit well with that gentleman. "I got him—and that's more than all you Jacksons could do," he responded shortly; "that is, if this is the fellow described in that wanted notice you sent me."

"He's the fellow, all right," said Dale Jackson, glaring at Sandy venomously. "He'll pay for dry-gulching Ike and Sheriff Pickett, as well as for that horse-stealing."

"You're a liar," said Sandy from the cell. "Dale Jackson, you're a liar by the clock. You know I shot Ike in fair fight in the middle of Buckhannon. You Jacksons brought Buck to Buckhannon, so if he was stole you're the one to tell about it. And as for dry-gulching Uncle Dan—you-all will pay for that some day, if it's the last thing I do on this God's earth."

"You're talkin' big, fellow." It was Horse-Trader who cut in, "Maybe we'll give you a chance to show how good you are." He turned to the marshal. "You'll get your five hundred soon as you sign him over to us."

"Sign him over—? What do you mean?" queried the marshal puzzledly.

"Murder comes ahead of horse-stealing," said Horse-Trader grimly. "So I reckon Buckhannon has the call over Black Rock, as far as this fellow is concerned. We'll take him back to Buckhannon with us tomorrow when we go. And now I got to go and fix things for our horse drive."

He went out. But young Dale Jackson who, Sandy noticed, still walked with a limp, turned at the door and came back. He poked the marshal in the ribs jocularly.

"You don't care whether you collect your five hundred for him cold, or on the hoof, do you?"

Black Jack started at him. "Cold?"

"Sure. You don't want him to come up for no trial, an' talk, do you?" demanded the younger Jackson, leering at Sandy. "Horse-Trader's got fool notions, sometimes. Me and you have got to look after this fellow, ourselves. There ain't no reason why you an' me can't take him out in the hills somewhere tomorrow early to identify something or other, is there?"

"Identify something?" Black Jack's brows were knit in bewilderment. "But what is there to identify?"

"Nothing!" Dale Jackson shook his red head disgustedly. "You are a fool, Black Jack. If out there in the woods the prisoner takes it into his head to make a break, we got to shoot him to stop him, ain't we? Well, when I shoot him this time, it ain't goin' to be no miss. That way he won't never come to trial to do no testifyin' about anything—see?"

AT the cold-blooded plot to take him outside of town and shoot him down, Sandy, inside his cell, felt the blood run cold within him. Dale Jackson, he knew, was vindictive enough to do as he had said. And Black Jack Morgan was not the man to defend his prisoner. As they walked away through the front office, Sandy could hear the two of them still talking, but already Black Jack was weakening in his replies. He was giving in rapidly.

Sandy got up and rattled the door and called out. If he could see the stableman again, perhaps he could fix it so he he would not be taken out of his cell

wthout other witnesses along than Black Jack and Dale Jackson.

But no one came. Evidently every one had left the jail temporarily, knowing the strength of the cell bars.

Eventually the deputy came back at dusk, bringing with him a dish of greasy beef and potatoes, and coffee in a tin can, for his prisoner's supper. Sandy asked to see the stable-keeper again, and was promptly refused. Strict orders, said the gruff deputy, against any more visitors seeing the prisoner. The deputy went back to the front office.

Sandy knew then that it was up to him. No assistance could reach him now from outside. He racked his brain for means of escape.

They had taken from him when they had put him in the cell, not only his gun and gunbelt, but his pocket knife, all his money, and even his chaps and spurs. But they had left him his belt, a hand plaited one of leather, with a metal buckle.

In the gathering shadows, Sandy took off this belt. He had no knife, but the belt was made up of thin but strong strips of buckskin which Sandy had plaited himself. With his teeth Sandy chewed at the end of the belt until at last he had chewed the stout leather in two where it ran through the buckle. After that it was easy to separate the strips of buckskin that made up the plaited belt. A few minutes deft work with fingers that moved as surely in the dark as in the light, and he had re-plaited the pliant leather into a single eight-foot length which he then oiled with grease he had saved from the potatoes and steak.

The deputy was reading an old newspaper by the light of the lamp in the marshal's office, but outside through the open cell window Sandy had seen the other lights of Black Rock go out one by one, except for the saloons and gambling houses.

The deputy put down his paper, stood up, yawned as if about to turn in for the night.

Sandy went to the cell door, whistled through it, then called, "Deputy! Oh, deputy!"

Grumbling, the deputy came to the door. "What d'ya want now?" he snarled. "Make it quick. I'm going to bed."

"I want a drink of water before you turn in," begged Sandy. "Them potatoes was too salty. I'm dry as the inside of a kitchen stove."

"Stay thirsty, then," said the deputy brutally. "Serve you right, you damn hoss-thief."

"Yeah?" said Sandy grimly. "Well, if you want to sleep, you better bring me that drink of water. If you don't I'll yell till I git it."

"You do, and I'll come in there and bend a gun-barrel over your head," said the deputy.

NEVERTHELESS he took a bucket and went outside. A few minutes later he returned with a bucket of water. He sat it down just outside Sandy's cell, and then went back for a cup.

Evidently the deputy was taking no chances, even with Sandy locked behind steel bars, for he had his gunbelt buckled on with the six-gun in its holster. And when he came toward Sandy with the cup of water in his hand, he brought in the other the lighted lamp so that he could watch his prisoner as he drank.

Sandy drank two cupfuls of water, leaning against the bars of the door. Then he passed the cup back through the bars with a word of thanks.

The deputy only grunted, and turned to waddle away, the lamp still in his hand.

In that instant Sandy moved. As the deputy turned his back Sandy's hand went behind him, came out again holding the plaited and greased leather rope, with the belt-buckle woven in for a hondo. Reaching his hand and arm through the bars he whirled the eight-foot lasso, shot it with a lightning-quick overhand flip straight toward the departing deputy's head.

Weighted by the buckle, the loop shot out straight and true, fell over the deputy's head and tautened with a jerk as Sandy hauled hard with both hands, and with his knees against the steel door for leverage.

The plaited leather lasso was not larger than a baby's finger, but it was stronger than a half-inch manila rope. And the deputy was off balance, utterly unprepared for any such sudden jerk from the rear. He toppled backward full against the cell door, instinctively jerking at the thing around his neck as he did so. The lamp dropped to the floor with a crash, flickered and then went out in a rattle of broken glass.

But even before light gave way to dense blackness, Sandy's ready hand had finished its job. It had darted through the steel bars like a striking snake, had grabbed the butt of the deputy's gun sticking out of the holster. Once, twice, Sandy struck with the heavy barrel of the Colt .45 full against the deputy's head. The jailor suddenly crumpled at the knees and went limp. He lay in a huddled heap on the floor just outside the cell bars.

Sandy let go rope and gun, dropped to his knees and felt with both hands through the bars. He found the deputy's pocket, searched it. It was empty except for knife and tobacco. He searched another pocket, his heart beating high. If the deputy did not carry the keys on him, all his work would have been for naught.

But his eager questing hands found the keys, a bunch of them, in the second pocket. He pulled them out, tried them in the cell lock, reaching out and inserting them from the outside.

The third key fitted. With a rasp and a click the cell bolt shot back. Sandy stepped through the door. Tying the unconscious deputy's hands and gagging him with his own neckerchief, Sandy dragged him back into the cell and locked the door.

Inside the marshal's office Sandy found his own gun and gunbelt and chaps. These he donned, as well as the deputy's gunbelt and Colt which he slung from his left hip. Then blowing out the light, he opened the jail door, peered out for a moment, and then like a shadow slipped around the building and to the back.

CHAPTER VII
Besieged

HE had hoped that he might find a horse, either near the jail or else where one had been left by some range rider celebrating late over a bar or gambling table.

But there was no horse in sight. There would be horses at the stable, of course, but it would lead to certain discovery to attempt to steal one there.

There was nothing to do but to walk. And Sandy, like any other cowboy, hated to walk worse than a cat hates cold water. His high-heeled boots would have made it almost impossible to walk any distance at all without crippling him. So he kicked them off regretfully, slashed his leather chaps and from them made two rough moccasins which he bound around his feet. Then he started for the hills.

Just how long he walked, Sandy never quite knew. From the soreness of his feet and muscles, unaccustomed to walking, he felt as though it were an eternity. But the day was just beginning to break in the east, when he reached the clump of oaks at the crest of the first string of foothills where the old trail turned up into the little valley.

It was while going through this oak clump that Sandy heard the thud of galloping hoofs close behind him, from the direction of Black Rock.

He listened keenly—only one horse, therefore one rider.

Ghostlike Sandy faded into the low brush beside the trail. He grimly drew his Colt, thumb on the hammer. Then as the rider and horse pounded around

the bend, he leaped into the trail. "Get 'em up!" he yelled. "Reach for the sky! . . . Oh heck, it's me—Sandy!"

In that last moment he had suddenly recognized the rider. It was Betty Bowie, her face flushed, her horse blowing from the speed with which she had ridden.

FOR a moment the girl had jerked her horse up short at the sudden apparition in her path. She threw her weight to the side, swung the pony around as if to swing him into the woods and ride for it. But at Sandy's voice she eased up and brought her plunging horse around into the trail again.

"Sandy . . .!" she cried. "But—but I heard you were in jail!"

"I was," said Sandy grimly. "But I'm not now. You heading for your Uncle Jim?"

The girl nodded. "I tried to get to see you, but the deputy wouldn't let me in. So I slipped out this morning, to tell Uncle Jim—but I've got to hurry back before they find I'm gone."

"I'll just ride up with you if your hoss'll carry double," said Sandy, rubbing his blistered feet tenderly.

"Come on, then." A second later, Sandy, swinging up behind, was riding up the trail through the clearing toward the old log barn.

In the morning gray it looked more deserted than ever. Like a thing of evil it seemed to lie there, brooding, sullen.

At the door Sandy swung off to give the girl a hand with the food she had brought strapped in a sack behind her saddle. She too had dropped off, hitching her horse to the ground by dropping the reins over his head.

"Uncle Jim!" she called softly, jerking the door open. "Uncle Jim, we're here! But I've got to hurry—*oh!*"

Sandy heard her sudden shout, saw her turn to run. Wildly he threw the sack from him, tried to get at his gun. But before his fingers even found the butt, men came swarming out of the apparently deserted barn. Men who fell on him, bore him down, disarmed him before he could even cry out.

His captors did not tie Sandy; it was not necessary. With his own holsters empty and a six-gun held in the middle of his back, he was helpless to do anything except follow orders.

But he was not alone in his helplessness. Almost immediately old Jim Bowie was marched out of the barn in the same helpless predicament. The surprise had been complete.

THE first person among his captors that Sandy recognized was Black Jack Morgan, the marshal of Black Rock. But immediately following him was some one at sight of whom Sandy instinctively clenched his fists and tightened his muscles. For it was Horse-Trader Jackson. And the other Jacksons were there, too, even including young red-headed Dale Jackson, with a look of surprise and vindictive disappointment on his face.

But what were all the Jacksons doing here? What was Black Jack doing here, for that matter? Sandy knew no one had passed him from Black Rock since he had made his escape the night before. Then these must have come out ahead of the escape—in which case how had they known and been expecting him?

Old Jim Bowie, with a big bruise and gash across his head where he had evidently been knocked down with a gun-barrel, let out a stream of profanity as he saw Sandy.

"They slipped up on me—grabbed me when I was asleep, else they'd never got me," he said bitterly. "I'd never have let the dirty skunks get you, either, if I'd been able. But they knocked me down and set on me, damn 'em—and tied a dirty stick in my mouth too to keep me from yelling. The sons of buzzards!"

Black Jack Morgan was grinning, although he too was undoubtedly surprised at seeing Sandy. "Well, this is one ghost party that was sure a success. When that fool Happy said there was a

ghost out here, we come to look for him on gen'ral principles. But we didn't expect to see old man Bowie nor an escaped hoss-thief out here. If that sheep-brained deputy let you loose. . . ." His voice became threatening.

"More likely he busted loose," said Horse-Trader Jackson. "It's too bad he's a McLeod; he woulda made a blame good Jackson."

"What—what are you going to do with them—my uncle and Sandy?" inquired the girl unsteadily. It was the first words she had spoken. She was not bound or patently guarded in any way, but Sandy noticed that one of the Jacksons always stood between her and the horses.

"Well, we figger on turning your uncle back to the prison he escaped from," said Black Jack Morgan with a leer. "This young hoss-thief here, he's wanted for murder down south. The Jacksons here'll take care of him. And you done shore let yourself in for trouble, too, I'm afraid, Miss Betty—helpin' hide an escaped convict and bringin' him grub and ammunition is a prison offense anywhere."

"Prison—?" said the girl, bewildered.

"Yeah," said the heavy-jowled marshal, leering again. "Still, I reckon we c'n beat that charge, all right. Me an' you'll just get married—then I won't have to testify against you. The Law don't make a man testify against his wife. And none o' these here others'll be here to testify again' you, if I ask 'em not."

"Marry—*you?*" Anger and indignation swept the fog of bewilderment from the girl's mind. She glared at the marshal with such loathing that he instinctively backed away from her. "I'd go to jail for life before I'd marry you—you pole-cat!"

"Heh? Huh? Pole-cat—?" Black Jack's face twisted into a snarl. "Won't marry me, huh? Maybe you'll be glad to marry me before I'm through with you, Miss Uppity!" He made as if to grab her arm.

AND then Horse-Trader did a surprising thing. He reached out and pushed the beetle-browed marshal away with a sturdy arm. "You won't do nothin', Black Jack," he said shortly. "I knew you was lowdown, but I didn't know you was a yellow skunk. We Jacksons don't claim to be no angels, but we don't bother women—and we don't stand with anybody else bothering 'em either!"

At the marshal's words to the girl, something had snapped in Sandy, too. A hot wild wave of unreasoning hate swept over him. "If you'll just give me my gun with one cartridge in it, and put me and this Morgan skunk out there in the clearing with both his guns in his hands, it'll be a favor I won't forget," he said hoarsely. "After that you can start shooting as quick as you want to, for that Buckhannon business—and I'll call it square."

A gleam of approval came into the steely eyes of Horse-Trader Jackson. "You got guts," he said. "I kinda thought you had, when you stood up to the lot of us in Buckhannon. That business will have to be settled sometime, I reckon. This girl business, though—I figger I can look out for that, maybe."

One of the younger Jacksons moved impatiently. "Well, ain't we goin' to get started? We better start if we're goin' to get them horses moved down at all today."

"All right," said Horse-Trader. "You go fetch the saddle horses where we left 'em. And bring that half-wit Happy along—hello, here he comes now, lookin' for his ghost, I reckon."

It was Happy Hopkins who came running up. The half-wit's face was alight with greed and eagerness. "Gimme my dollar!" he cried as he approached. "Gimme my dollar, Black Jack! You bet me a dollar against my old sling I couldn't show you no ghost out here! Well, there he is! Now gimme my dollar!"

He was pointing toward old Jim Bowie. Apparently as yet he had not

noticed the girl, half hidden by Horse-Trader's huge form.

But Betty Bowie stepped out into sight. "Oh, how could you, Happy?" she cried despairingly. "How could you betray me? How could you make so much trouble for me? All for a dollar —! Oh Happy, I never thought it of you!"

For the first time the half-wit saw her; he stared, his eyes as big as marbles. "Huh?" he stammered. "Me do what—? Make trouble for you, Miss Betty? I never done that! I just said there was a ghost up here at the old barn, and when Black Jack laughed at me, I bet him my old sling here against a new silver dollar! An' I won, too—dad-burn him!"

"Yes—and you ruined my uncle and me," answered the girl sadly. "You didn't know, Happy, I'm sure of it. But the ghost is my uncle here—and Black Jack's going to send him to jail. And maybe me too . . ."

"Jail?" The half-wit repeated the word as if he did not recognize its meaning. "Send you to jail? Why, he never said nothin' about that to me!" All at once his face twisted into a terrible snarl, the more awful by contrast with that previously half-vacant look. "You—you—!" he gibbered at the marshal. "You touch Miss Betty, and I'll kill you! I told you I would! I'll kill you —I'll kill you—!"

AS he shouted, his hands had been fumbling behind him. Suddenly they came into sight, and as they did so Sandy recognized in one of them that short odd contraption of leather which he had seen once before. The half-wit stumbled back, swinging his arm as he did so. The big marshal saw, recognized the instrument, too. He too stepped back, his face angry; his arm fell to his holster, yanked a gun out. "Don't you!" he commanded. "Don't you pull that thing at me—I'll fill you full of lead, you fool!"

But before he could thumb back the trigger—before Sandy or Horse-Trader or any one else there could step forward to stop the tragedy—the half-wit had loosened his sling. True as a bullet the stone missile flew toward the marshal's head. Black Jack only half ducked out of the way as it landed with a dull thud. The next instant the gun in the marshal's hand went off with a crash of fire and the half-wit crumpled and fell forward, clutching at his breast and screaming, while the marshal himself tottered and went to his knees, still holding the smoking pistol in his hands.

For a moment everyone else seemed frozen with horror at the shooting. Sandy it was who first woke to action. Lightning quick he grasped at the momentary diversion. He whirled on the man behind him who held the gun on his back, and tore it from his grasp before the other could move. At the same time he cried out hoarsely: "Bowie! Betty! Run for the barn—quick! I'll hold 'em off for a second! But hurry!"

At that, old man Bowie, with a shout whirled on his own guard and disarmed that still dazed individual. Then only waiting to give a hurried thwack at the guard's head with the Colt barrel, he whirled on the girl and shoved her toward the open barn door just behind them. "You heard him!" he ordered shrilly. "Git in there—quick! So I can git in, too, and help Sandy out there!"

Sandy did not need help, however. Under the sudden shift in situation, with Sandy's gun swinging from one to another, the Jacksons stared, then scattered wildly. Only old Horse-Trader went for his gun, and at him Sandy threw a hurried shot, throwing himself to the side as he did so to escape the return bullet from the Horse-Trader's swiftly drawn weapon.

Even as he fired, Sandy knew he had missed. Horse-Trader Jackson, old and experienced at gun fighting, had flung his own body sidewise even as he drew and fired. His bullet clipped a lock of hair at Sandy's temple as it sped by. Even with only one man making a sign

of resistance, Sandy knew he had lost the initiative. The rest of the Jacksons had separated, dropping to the ground or running for safety behind the old well and the fallen chimney of the burned ranch house. Within a few seconds they would be pouring bullets into him from all directions, catching him in a deadly cross-fire out there in the open.

With the cloud of smoke from the two shots still covering him, Sandy whirled and flung himself for the open doorway of the barn only a few feet away. He fell over the log sill, into the shadows and safety of the interior, with bullets whirring around him as he rolled. Then from the doorway he heard old Jim Bowie send back a shot in return, and curse with disgust. "Hell! I had a fair shot at that damn Black Jack and missed him clean! He's got up an' run for that old tumble-down chimney. An' he made it, damn it!"

WHEN Sandy scrambled up, his first thought was to see that the girl Betty was in a safe place, low down in a corner where she would be protected both by the heavy sill logs and the notched corners. Then cautiously he peeked through the doorway.

The little open space in front of the door was empty except for the crumpled body of Happy Hopkins. Evidently all the Jacksons, as well as the giant Black Jack had thought it foolish to remain in the open under fire of guns from the occupants of the log barn. They had fled to cover behind the broken chimney of the burned ranch house, the stone well curbing, and the two or three trees that grew around the well. Sandy wondered how they had managed to reach shelter without damage from the fire of Jim Bowie, but the latter answered his unspoken question.

"Threw two shots at 'em and missed!" he snorted. "Damn them two years in jail—plumb ruined my shootin', they did. But I shore made that Black Jack pick up his feet and fly, anyway!"

"Well, no use wasting bullets now," said Sandy, squinting out again. "I can't see hide nor hair of 'em."

And indeed at the distance of over a hundred yards, it would have taken phenomenal snap shooting to hit a stray boot heel or elbow joint momentarily visible from behind tree or rock or stone curbing.

The attackers were not wasting many bullets, either. Just occasionally there would come a flash of smoke and fire from tree or stone pile, and a bullet would fly through the open doorway or else smash into one of the thick logs with a dull thud. Sandy did not even bother to answer these shots. They had no bullets to waste, as it was. But he knew too, their enemies, especially an old fighter like Horse-Trader, would not be likely to waste bullets either.

"There's no way they can get inside here from the back, or above, is there?" he asked.

Old Man Bowie shook his head. "Nope; she's built solid. Maybe you better pull the chinking out of a few places on the sides and back and take a look around every few minutes, though. They could burn us out if they sneaked up close and set a fire to the logs at the back. And I been burnt out once—I don't hanker for a second singein'."

With a few pokes of his Colt barrel Sandy knocked out some of the chinking between the logs on both sides and at the back, so that he could not only look through, but fire through as well. But the open space all around the barn was still empty.

He returned to the front doorway again. The stray shots were still dropping. "Looks like all they're trying to do is keep us here," he said suspiciously. "They're up to something."

"Well, they can't do us no more damage at this range with six-guns than we can do to them," said old man Bowie contentedly.

"That's what looks suspicious to me—uh-huh, there's the answer to it!" said Sandy suddenly. "There—coming out from the trees and circling up in back!"

SURE enough, over near the far edge of the clearing, so far as to be almost safely out of range of any but an accidental pistol bullet from the log barn, one of the Jacksons was running up toward the besiegers, keeping the fallen chimney and tree trunks in between him and the barn as he came. In his hands he carried what looked like a bundle of sticks.

"One of the Jacksons that stayed with the horses—he's bringing their rifles up," he cried out. "They're going to open up on us with them."

"They'll have a hard time driving even a rifle bullet through these logs," said old man Bowie. They're better'n a foot thick. I know—I built 'er."

"They won't be shooting at the logs—they'll be aiming at the chinks between," said Sandy sharply. "Horse-Trader out there is a dead shot with a rifle; he can hit any of these chinks here ten times out of ten. We got to duck and duck low—behind these bottom sills. The bullets will be flying around this place like wild bees in just a couple of minutes."

And he spoke the truth. In little more than that time, a rifle began to speak steadily from over beyond the broken pile of chimney—and steadily the bullets tapped along the line of chinking between the logs, driving through it, sending the splinters flying, and then whining on to lose themselves with dull thuds in the far side of the log barn.

CHAPTER VIII
Horse-Thief Posse

BUT low behind the huge logs that formed the sills and foundations, the three defenders lay in safety. Old Bowie was at one corner. At the other Sandy lay close to Betty Bowie. He looked at her as a splinter whirled past them. She had turned toward him. Her eyes met his, a slow smile came to them. Sandy, who had never given thought to a woman before, felt a wave of admiration creep over him. This was a regular girl—not only pretty and wholesome looking, but absolutely unafraid.

"I was just thinking how much like a bee that splinter sounded," she said, still smiling. "You know, one of those bumble bees that bumbles around, and then flies into a hole in a rafter."

Sandy grinned. "Well, it can't last forever. All I want to do is get a bead on Black Jack Morgan!"

The girl shuddered. "He ought not to be shot. He ought to be hung! Did you see him—he shot poor Happy down like he would a coyote or skunk. And he knew Happy wasn't responsible—knew he was half-witted, could never hurt him."

"If he'd landed square with that rock he slung, he'd have hurt Black Jack, all right," said Sandy. "Black Jack was lucky it just caught him glancing. Just the same, I aim to make Black Jack pay up plenty for that shooting."

From the other side of the barn came old Bowie's snorting grunt. "You leave that Black Jack alone—he's my meat! I got first call on him—he lied me into jail, the son of a buzzard!"

"Not much chance of either one of us getting him," said Sandy gloomily. "Horse-Trader out there in front can keep us cooped in here until dark. Then they can sneak up on us—either rush us through the door, or more likely still burn the barn over us and shoot us when we come out."

Old man Bowie chuckled. "That's what they think—leastways that's what I hope they think. But you see they don't know Joe Lane and Doc Underwood come out here last night. And *they* know now *I* didn't do that horse-stealing."

There was an odd note of secretiveness in the old man's tone—a note that made Sandy look around inquiringly.

OLD man Bowie grinned again, triumphantly. "You remember that herd of horses we heard drove by here

the other night? Well, me and Doc and Joe Lane found 'em—up in a secret corral up in a little canyon mighty few folks know about. There was a lot of picked horses there—Bar X's, some Bar J's, and some even of Lane's Lazy—and the funny thing was, Lane hadn't sold none of them hosses to nobody."

At the old man's words, there came back to Sandy a recollection that the excitement of the last half hour had driven from his mind. "That's just what came to me in Black Rock today—who was doing the stealing, and how they got away with it. It was Black Jack Morgan himself, and the Jacksons. Black Jack would steal the horses here, and the Jacksons would drive 'em down south and sell them there. That's the way they stole old Buck and sold him to Sheriff Dan Pickett who sold him to us."

"It was a great game—no wonder nobody caught on to it, with the marshal himself being in on it," said old man Bowie. "They had a double-acting system. What Black Jack stole up here, the Jacksons would sell for him down south; and what the Jacksons stole down south Morgan would sell around up here. He's beein doing quite a business of horse-trading himself. Not only hosses, but stock as well."

"It was double-action in more ways than one," said Sandy grimly. "They'd rustle the ranches broke, down home, then loan 'em money on mortgages, and rustle 'em again, then foreclose on the notes and git the ranch too. No wonder they were getting hold of the whole valley, and driving the old-timers out."

"Well, this is one time when their scheme runs into a plumb snag," said old man Bowie. "Because Doc and Joe Lane was going back to round up a lot of other fellows that have been losing hosses and beef stock around here, and bring 'em out to show 'em what's hid in that corral up here. And they ought to be along most any time now. . . . By the wall-eyed moon, there they come now! Now the fun's goin' to begin!"

SANDY saw them then, a crowd of horsemen, just coming out of the trees at the end of the clearing where the road from Black Rock came in. But just for a moment they were in the open. Then they galloped back into the trees again.

The Jacksons and Black Jack Morgan, at the well and behind the crumbling stone chimney, must have seen them, also. Their fire diminished, died away altogether. After the rapid rattle of gunfire, silence came suddenly, surprisingly, to the little valley.

In the middle of it a horseman rode out of the trees again, but for only a few feet. Even at that distance there was something about his stocky body that reminded Sandy of Lane, the stable-owner of Black Rock.

The horseman stood up in his saddle, raised his sand. Across the clearing, in the silence, his shout came loud and clear to Sandy, in the besieged barn. "Black Jack! Morgan!"

From somewhere close to the well curbing came the rumbling answer of the marshal. "What d'ya want?"

"You!" was the swift reply. "We want to know how come all them stolen horses up in that little corral up the gap, Black Jack."

"Well, we got the hoss-thieves cooped up in this old barn now," answered the marshal. "We'll bring 'em in—don't you worry. That's my job—I got my own posse here to give me all the help I need. You can just fog it back to town, Lane!"

"Yeah!" was the retort. "Well, if that tough bunch of strangers you was with yesterday is your posse, I reckon we'll still sit in the game. If there's any posseing done around here, we figure on home boys doing it—not strangers from somewheres else!"

"I'm marshal—and I'll pick my own posses," shouted back Black Jack angrily.

"You *was* marshal," came back the answer. "But it was us elected you, and we're taking back our votes now. And

we're taking you and that stranger posse of yours back to Black Rock till we git the straight of all this hoss-stealing, too. And you ain't just talkin' to me—you're talkin' to most of Black Rock and roundabouts. There's over two dozen of us—William of the Bar G, Simpson of the Lazy S, Rawlins of the Frying Pan, and everybody. Are you coming peaceable, or do we have to take you?"

"Take—and be damned!" suddenly shouted the marshal with an oath. "Anybody interferin' with the law is takin' his own chances. You'll get bullets, that's what you'll get!"

The horseman at the far end of the clearing kneed his horse around. He seemed to be talking to his companions in the trees, but his voice, loud and commanding, still came clear to the log barn.

"All right, boys, scatter out and edge around! Git ready to ride 'em down! Git 'em alive if you can—but git 'em. . . . *Ride!*"

WITH his last words, his horse spun around like a top, was in full gallop within two lengths. And out of the trees all along the end of the clearing, there came bolting after him a mob of cowboys and townsmen, guns raised. They let out a yell as they charged down toward the well and ruined chimney.

From Black Jack and his companions there came a sudden burst of fire. In the center of the charge, just behind the leader, a horse and rider went down. But the only other result was that the riders scattered out, and bending low over their horses' necks to make less of a target, drove on for the ruins of the burned ranch house.

But now Sandy saw the reason for Black Jack's long drawn-out conference with the stable-owner. From the side of the clearing almost even with the barn, there came dashing out a single horseman; but behind him, on ropes, came half a dozen saddled horses. He was spurring for all he was worth, riding for the well curb. It was one of the younger Jacksons who evidently had been left to hold the horses of the rustlers. Now he was making a desperate effort to bring them in before the Black Rock men came up.

It would be a close race—too close. Black Jack and the Jacksons realized it. Suddenly from behind curb and trees and chimney, the Jacksons and Morgan rose up, turned to run to meet the youth desperately striving to bring up their mounts. Only Horse-Trader Jackson remained behind. He had come from the shelter of his chimney, but now standing up, he had turned to face the charging Black Rock men. His great gaunt face was cradled against his rifle butt; as calmly as if shooting at a target, he stood there in the open, making a stand-off fight to give his men time to reach their horses.

Sandy gave a grunt of admiration in spite of himself, at the recklessness of the outlaw leader—one man trying to stand off thirty.

But then he realized all at once that the fleeing outlaws would have to pass close to the barn to get to their horses. And with the realization, came another; old man Bowie and Betty Bowie seemed to be struggling crazily at the open barn door. He heard the girl cry, "Don't! . . . Don't! You haven't got a chance! Don't go out there . . .!"

And then old man Bowie's voice rose shrill and wild, his words broken, disconnected. ". . . . sent me to jail for two years! . . . Well, I'll send *him* to hell, from now on—! Let go of me, girl!"

Then he was gone, through the open doorway and out into the early morning sunlight. He was galloping awkwardly, seeming to favor one leg more than the other, and he carried his pistol shoulder high in his hand.

Then Sandy saw who it was old man Bowie was running toward. Black Jack Morgan, the nearest of the enemy to the barn, was running heavily through the knee-high grass. Apparently he had forgotten about those in the barn. He only looked ahead toward the horses,

with occasionally a glance back over his shoulder toward the Black Rock riders. He was cursing in a steady roar.

Sandy started for the door, too. He ran into the girl there. She was trying to get through the doorway at the same time that he was. He heard her crying over and over, partly to him, partly as if to herself. "Don't let him—! Stop him! Those two years in jail—rheumatism—he hasn't got a chance against *him!* Stop him!"

Then Sandy had grabbed her around the waist. Almost roughly he dragged her out of the doorway, threw her backward. "Get out of the way—bullets flying here in a minute!"

Then he too was out in the sun; his eyes instinctively narrowed against the rays slanting into them. He felt the morning breeze flick the hair above his forehead.

He hardly realized that he had his own gun ready in his hand, muzzle slanting upward, all ready to throw down on a target. All he was thinking of was to catch up with that limping stumbling old man up ahead—the man she had begged him to stop.

He was too late. He saw Black Jack running at full stride, suddenly slow down as old man Bowie came running toward him. A snarl came over the running marshal's face—rage and gloating triumph, mixed. The gun the marshal carried in his hand did not even seem to lift to the target; Sandy saw the bloom of smoke and fire from the muzzle. Almost together he saw it and the smoke from old man Bowie's gun, as he too fired. But that other bloom of smoke had come first—perceptibly first. Sandy saw old man Bowie stumble, fall forward on his face, all sprawling out. Black Jack Morgan still ran on at his half trot. Then his face snarled again as he saw Sandy. Again that quick upward swing of the gun-muzzle . . .

SANDY did not realize that he himself had fired until he felt the jerk of the heavy Colt in his hand. It came almost simultaneously with a shrieking something that tore past his ear and plucked at his hair in passing. But his eyes, fixed on the scowling face before him saw the sudden look of shock, of horror, appear there—the suddenly opened mouth, the wide eyes, the look of terrific unbearable pain that shot across the whole face. Then the eyes closed even as the head dropped and the body beneath it all crumpled. Sandy all but stepped on the fallen marshal as he ran forward toward that other battle still going on ahead of him. It seemed to Sandy that he was in a peculiar daze, being drawn forward, running, shooting under a spell that gave him no volition of his own.

He heard guns all around him now. The cries of men, yells, curses—once or twice the scream of a wounded horse. Whining bees whirled past him.

There ahead of him was the thing that had made him keep running. Horse-Trader Jackson, now running a few steps, now turning to fire a shot or two, then whirling to run again. The man had already been wounded. Sandy saw the smear of blood on the side of his face and again on the sleeve of his left forearm. But apparently the outlaw's own bullets had been no less deadly. The Black Rock men no longer charged straight at him to ride him down; they had broken and swerved away to the left, riding toward the Jackson horses and the edge of the clearing there to cut them off.

Not thirty feet from him, Sandy saw Horse-Trader Jackson stop again, raise his rifle and squint down the barrel toward the nearest one of those galloping foes. There was grimness in that gaunt aquiline face, but there was wild joy there too—the joy of a fighting man whose blood runs hot with battle.

Sandy could have shot him down then before the other could even have known Sandy was there. And Horse-Trader Jackson was an outlaw and a killer, Sandy knew. An outlaw and a horse-thief and a killer—but Sandy remem-

bered too that this same outlaw had put out rough hands, hurled Black Jack Morgan back when the brutal marshal had tried to bother a girl. The Jacksons, outlaws, horse thieves, killers—but "we Jacksons don't bother women!"

Sandy licked his dry lips, shouted horsely. "Horse-Trader! Horse-Trader Jackson . . ."

The rifleman whirled around at the cry. He did not shoot immediately. In surprise apparently he had lowered his rifle. A queer crooked smile came across his face. "The last of the McLeods, hey! And me—the last of the Jacksons! Let 'er go!"

The smoke spurted suddenly from his rifle muzzle. He had not lifted it to his shoulder again, but had fired from his hip, just as Sandy also had fired. Sandy felt a hot burning pain, and a terrific jolt as if a mule kick high up on his shoulder. It spun him half around, but even as he spun he had thumbed the hammer of his Colt back, had let it fall. Through the thick cloud of acrid smoke that rose to choke his breathing he saw Horse-Trader Jackson stagger, drop his rifle, make heavy groping efforts to pick it up again—and then fall across the muzzle of the Winchester.

CHAPTER IX
The Gunsmoke Lifts

WHEN the smoke and daze had lifted again from Sandy's eyes and brain, the valley was peaceful again. No rattle of shots set the echoes rolling, no thud of hoofs or shouts of riding cowboys broke the silence. The Jacksons had been cornered, those that had not been killed were securely tied, hand and foot, and under guard. Black Jack Morgan lay stretched out, lifeless, with his hat over his eyes.

Oddly enough neither Horse-Trader Jackson nor old man Bowie was dead. Old man Bowie with bandages now lay with a blanket under his head, close to Sandy, while Betty Bowie gently bathed his face with cool water. Already Sandy's wounds, like all the others had been washed and bandaged by that capable young lady. Now she had turned to attend her uncle again.

Old man Bowie's eyes opened, blinked. He stared for a second as if dazed, and then suddenly tried to sit up, looked around.

"Black—Jack—! That damn' crooked marshal—!" he gasped. "Did I— Did I git him?"

Betty did not answer. Instead she looked beseechingly at Sandy, who was leaning against the side of the barn a few feet away.

Sandy grinned. "Sure, old-timer," he lied. "Your first shot—plumb center. Some shooting' too, for a feller with a hole in his lungs like you got!"

The old man lay back. A look of content came over his face. "I'd have got him if I'd had a hole through my heart. I don't mind going now—since I got him."

"Hush up talking like that," admonished the girl, although gently. "You aren't going anywhere, except to bed for six weeks. Doctor Underwood said you'd be just as well and full of cussedness as ever before fall." She looked back at Sandy.

He had been staring at her all the time, realizing just how nice a girl could look, even after going through what Betty Bowie had just experienced. Realizing that she had caught him staring, he flushed, looked away in embarrassment.

His feelings were saved somewhat by Doctor Underwood just then rising from beside the man he had been working over and beckoning to Sandy.

SANDY rose and went over. His shoulder was sore and stiff and felt unreal bandaged against his side like that, but he could walk all right.

". . . . wants to talk to you—hasn't got more'n a half hour left, at most," said the elderly doctor in a low voice. "It's

a wonder he lasted this long; he must be made of iron."

Sandy looked down. It was Horse-Trader Jackson who lay there. And Horse-Trader Jackson was looking up at him with that same queer crooked smile on his face.

"The last of the McLeods . . .!" said he, haltingly, having to stop to catch his breath. "But the McLeods outlast the Jacksons! Who'd have believed it!"

Sandy somehow, as much as he knew he ought to hate this man before him, could not do it. It is hard to hate a man who is within a half hour of death. "It was luck!" said Sandy. "A bad man always has bad luck in the end."

"Not luck!" said the outlaw. "Fight —you got plenty fight in you. Wisht you'd been—a Jackson. They never would—licked us. Oh well, all over now. An'—got something to tell you. You too, Doc . . ."

He paused for a moment, breathing heavily, while he regained his strength. Sandy bent lower to catch his words, rapidly becoming fainter.

"—Buckhannon Valley—it's yours. You win it. Right for winner have valley. That mortgage note— Your Dad didn't know what he was signin'. Thought it was—petition for school, like rest of 'em signed. Was two papers, though, one on top of other. Fooled your Dad into signin' mortgage."

"I could forgive you for that," said Sandy slowly. "But not for murdering Uncle Dan Pickett."

Horse-Trader Jackson shook his head, but not with remorse. "Not me—didn't kill him. Dale killed him—me, I never killed a man in my life wasn't looking. Didn't have to. Dale killed Sheriff—his idea—him and William's."

"Dale's dead," said Sandy grimly. "But I'll go back to Buckhannon—to see William."

A slow smile came over Horse-Trader's face. "Give a hundred dollars—see William's face—when you went in. William always sat back—let us do the stealin' an' fightin'."

HE closed his eyes, lay still. For a second Sandy thought the old outlaw's life had passed in that last breath. But after a moment he opened his eyes again. They fastened on Sandy long, searchingly, "You—last of McLeods—" he gasped. "But McLeods outlasted Jacksons. No more Jacksons—plenty more McLeods — whole valley full o' McLeods some day—" He was not looking at Sandy now. His eyes had wandered over toward the barn—toward where Betty Bowie knelt beside her uncle. "You got luck—feller . . ."

Sandy saw that the girl had heard. He saw the red flush mount to her cheeks, making them prettier than ever. She raised her eyes, met his, and looked away hurriedly. The flushed cheeks still remained pink.

Sandy looked back at the sound of a sudden long sigh. The doctor was bending over the old outlaw. Then slowly he took the outlaw's hands, crossed them over his breast, pulled the weather-beaten old hat down to cover the fighter's face.

"A bad man—" he said slowly. "A hard man—but a man!"

He turned around to Sandy. "Reckon you'll be ridin' back home, now?" he said inquiringly.

Sandy shook his head. "Got to ride back to Buckhannon—to see someone," he said. "But I'll be back."

THE END

A MYTH COMES TO LIFE

THE existence of white seals, heretofore regarded as mythical was reported here recently by the San Diego Zoological Society's expedition after its return from Guadalupe Island, off the Mexican coast. Members of the party reported white seals had been found on the inaccessible rocks of an outer islet where landing was impossible, so they were unable to obtain a specimen.

SIREN ISLAND

By H. S. M. KEMP

Author of "Quitter," "Carcajou Trail," etc.

CANADIAN WILDERNESS—Deep below the slush ice of Spirit Lake a frozen mystery lay buried. Steve Barrett staked his life against the treacherous water, pledged himself to uncover the secret. But it was in the flame of a faintly glittering campfire that he found the answer.

A Complete Novelet

STEVE BARRETT, northward bound from Galena City, pulled his dogs to a sudden stop. Devil's River, which he had been following for the last twenty miles, now opened up to lake-like proportions. Ahead of him, a mile away and in the middle of the current, was an island, low-lying and spruce-covered. To the right, near the shore-line, lay another island. Steve pulled a map from the inside pocket of his parka and studied it.

For a moment he followed on paper the tortuous river-route. His finger stopped at last where he judged himself to be.

"Spirit Lake," he read. "Yeh; that's it. And that island ahead—Spruce Island. The other one, near the shore—Crow Island." Then he read the penciled notation put there by a trail-wise trapper in Galena City: "Weak ice. Follow right shore."

Steve swung his team off the river and made for the bush at the river's mouth.

He boiled the kettle; fed fish to the dogs; stretched out for a half-hour's smoke.

Came a growl from his leader, a mouthy rumble. Steve looked up from the fire and saw two sleighs and two men making toward him, hugging the lake shore. Five minutes later they pulled into his noonday camp.

Steve first noticed that each man drove eight dogs, tandem-hitched to a high-headed toboggan. Strange enough, this, in a country where four- or five-dog teams were the thing. Then he

scrutinized the men. One was a rat-faced bird of skinny build, and the other a giant in mackinaws and otterskin cap. Of this latter man's face he could see but little, for white frost and icicles covered what the beard had missed.

THE big man pulled his straining eight to a stop.

"H'are yuh?"

Steve nodded. "Jake-a-bonne." Then: "Going to boil?"

The man turned to his mate; back to Steve again.

"Guess not. Et not long since." He dug into a hip-pocket and pulled out pipe and pouch. "Goin' far?"

Steve waved a hand northward. "Starving Lakes."

The big man nodded. "Yeh? Well, tell you: don't try crossin' here straight. Follow the shore like we bin doin'. Our pardner drowned here a week ago t'night. Wouldn't want yuh to do the same thing."

"That so?" Steve took this information with a sudden frown. "How did it happen?"

The big man scraped a match on the lazy-back of his cariole.

"By the way," he began. "Harris is my name, Bull Harris. But that ain't here nor there. . . . The kid, our partner, started out with us from Galena, makin' north. We hadn't got more'n ten-fifteen miles out when we found we'd left most of the grub behind. Kid goes back. We tell him, though, that we'd camp on Crow Island." The man turned to wave toward the island near the shore. "But I guess in the dark, he got kinda balled-up, hit straight out and went in. We heard him yellin' from our camp on Crow Island. Couldn't do nothin', though. By the time we got here it was all over. Dogs made to shore, but not Dick."

Steve was getting to his feet and looking out across the three-mile lake.

"Where did he go in? Can you see it?"

The big man moved to his side. "Lemme see. . . . Yeh!" he suddenly exclaimed. "See them bumps out there, 'bout hundred yards away? That's it! Broke-up ice." He was turning away again. "Tough, all right, but that's the way she goes."

"Which is the reason," put in Steve, "that you're driving eight each?"

"Sure. We hooked his dogs in with ours."

Steve shook his head. "Always heard the Devil's River was a bad one. Guess the current 's responsible."

"Yup." Bull Harris, as he called himself, began to pick up the headline of the sleigh and crawl aboard, but stopped abruptly. His gaze was fixed on the river-road. Steve looked in the direction and saw another dog-team making for the camp. "Pug Blake," noted Bull Harris. "Travelin' same way as you," he commented to Steve.

THE fourth train pulled in and a short, chunky man got out. He grinned, nodded to the other three, then abruptly ceased to smile. He was looking at the two eight-dog trains. Up at Bull Harris's face.

"Where's Dick?" he suddenly shot.

Bull Harris removed his pipe long enough to spit in the snow.

"Just tellin' the lad here what happened," he observed, and proceeded to give again the story of the tragedy. "Sure beats the devil," he mourned. "If I'd thought there was goin' to be any mix-up like that, I'd have gone back fer the lousy dog-feed myself."

Steve Barrett's eyes suddenly narrowed.

"I thought it was grub?" he pointed out.

Bull Harris seemed to catch himself. For a second a defensive look flashed across his face.

"Eh? Grub? No, it was dog-feed. Why—did I say 'grub' the first time?"

"Believe you did."

"Yeh; well. It was my mistake. Happened a week ago, so a feller can get easy balled-up."

"Sure thing." Steve passed the matter off casually, though Bull Harris' eyes held a struggling suspicion.

"Just a minute, though." The chunky man, Pug Blake, put in a quick question. "When did this happen, Bull? On the way up?"

"Yeh. Why?"

"Then what did you do after you knew he was drowned?" he demanded.

Bull scowled. "Whaddya think? The ice was too rotten to walk out on to try to look fer him. We went on and staked."

Pug Blake smiled harshly.

"The kid drowned a week ago . . . but you went on and staked!"

Bull ran a tongue along his lips. Squinted till his eyes were cold slits.

"Go on!" he prompted, a tiger's purr in his voice.

"Did you stake a share for the kid? Or did you grab it all?"

The words cut like a whip-lash. They were brutally sneering; contempt dripped from them.

"What the devil . . .?" roared Bull. He sprang forward. His fist lashed out. Pug Blake went flying backwards amongst his dogs "Don't try no blazer on me!" howled Bull Harris.

The rat-faced man laughed uneasily. Steve was loosening his parka. And Pug Blake struggled to his feet.

A thin trickle of blood ran from his split lips. He swayed for a moment; then launched himself at his assailant.

A flailing of arms. . . . A scuffling of feet. . . . Pug Blake went down for a second time.

Steve swallowed hard; loosened his parka and tied it again. Bull Harris seemed to tense; licked his lips and hunched his shoulders. And Pug Blake weaved in once more.

It was pathetic. He stood not the ghost of a chance. Against the mackinawed giant who outweighed him by fifty pounds and overtopped him by a foot, he was a bloody-faced Quixote tilting at a windmill. Four times in all he went down, the last time to hang swaying on hands and knees. Then as though a devil were hatched inside him, Bull Harris rushed in and began to boot him in the ribs.

THE rat-faced man moved hesitatingly. Steve beat him to it. He slid out of his parka, took two jumps and spun Bull Harris around.

"And that ends your song-and-dance!" he snapped.

Surprise showed in Bull Harris' face. Thwarted rage.

"Who are you?" he bawled. "You lay a mitt on me. . . ."

The words choked in his throat. Again his hairy fist shot out. And whistled past the spot where Steve's head had been a split-second before

Bull Harris blundered by. Turned. Rushed again. Steve feinted; hooked a smash to the teeth and another to the heart. The giant reeled, hands down, and Steve put all in one sickening crack on the point of the jaw. Bull Harris went over as though hit with a club.

Steve stepped over him; walked to where Pug Blake was getting to his feet. But Pug was forgetting his own bruises.

"How . . . how d'you do it?" he panted.

Steve grinned a bit. " 'The quickness of the hand,' " he quoted. He was looking Pug over, critically. "How are you feeling? Care for a shot of rum?"

Pug grunted. "Might clear the old head. Feels like it's been put through a rock-crusher."

From his sleigh Steve brought a bottle of liquor. Pug drank heartily. And by the time Steve was replacing the cork, Bull Harris was sitting up.

"Care for a drink?" Steve invited him.

But Bull Harris snarled like a trapped wolf.

"Keep ut! Got enough o' my own."

Steve turned to Pug Blake and smiled whimsically.

"Charming swine, your little friend," he noted, and walked to his sleigh to put the bottle away.

WHEN he returned he looked from one man to the other.

"There's quite a lot I don't understand about this business," he confessed. "But seeing that I've appointed myself a sort of arbiter, I'd like to know the rest. Anybody got anything to tell?"

Pug Blake wasted no time.

"I'll tell you, and blamed quick!" He shot an angry look at Bull Harris from half-closed eyes. "Tune in on this, you!" he ordered. "Any time I wander from the straight and narrer, yell out! But just now, I'm doin' the talking!

"This lad that's drowned, Dick Dutton, poked around north of here all summer, prospectin'," he informed Steve. "Along about freeze-up he pulled back into Galena City with some likely lookin' copper samples. He didn't know whether they're any good or not, so he shows 'em to Bull. Bull don't know either, but, as the kid's broke, he promises to put up the price of gettin' them assayed in Winnipeg and the expenses of goin' north again to stake. That right, Bull?"

"Yeh," snarled Bull Harris.

"The kid goes out," continued Pug. "Goes to Winnipeg with his samples, and last week comes back again and says they're good. Yeh; and brought his sister with him. Dick don't know where to leave the girl in a hell-hole like Galena City, so my wife says for her to stay with us. Last Monday, Bull and Dick Dutton, with Tad Schmidt here drivin' a third train o' dogs, pulled out for the North. Mind you, I didn't know where the kid got his samples. Only him and Bull knew. But, anyway, off they went. And," finished Pug, "you can see for yourself how she ends."

"Dick drowns here on Spirit Lake."

"Yeh. Too bad, ain't it," put in Pug again, insinuatingly, "that the only one who gets anything out of the deal is Bull!"

BULL HARRIS was on his feet rushing at Pug. Steve had to push him bodily back.

"What are yuh tryin' to pull off?" he demanded. "That I bumped the kid? Fer a pinch o' snuff I'd tear the lyin' tongue outa yuh by the roots!"

"Just a minute! Just a minute!" urged Steve. He was holding the roaring Bull Harris by the front of his mackinaw-coat. "There's no use making cracks like that, Pug. It's bad. And use your head. How could Bull bump him, anyway? He couldn't carry him out on the ice and push him through that hole. The ice is too weak. He'd go in himself."

"That's all right," snarled Pug, doggedly. "There's other ways. What was to stop him from lightin' a fire on Spruce Island out there and lettin' the kid make for it?"

Steve raised his eyebrows; turned to Bull Harris.

But Bull laughed sneeringly.

"You're crazy, yuh hop-head! Get up there where the ground's higher and take a look. There's open water all round that island, and she's open all winter. The current does that. And yuh call yourself a trapper!" he sneered. "A man who's bin over this lake fer ten years, they say!"

Pug Blake grunted. For a moment or so he seemed overwhelmed with the impossibility of the scheme he had propounded. Then Bull Harris broke in again.

"And if that ain't enough, tell yuh what I'll do: take yuh over to Crow Island and show yuh where we camped. And after that, if yuh give me any good reason why Dick should hit out to Spruce Island, I'll eat the biggest dog in yore string, hair and all!"

"But say!" suddenly exploded Pug Blake. "He says Dick was drowned! But who proves it? Did he ever find his body? Did he ever look for it, even?"

Bull Harris snorted in disgust, though his teeth gritted.

"Say!" he snarled to Steve. "If yuh want that jug-head to see town agin all in one piece, make him shut his mouth! I can stand just so much o' that."

IT seemed to be distinctly up to Steve. For a moment or so he weighed the pros and the cons of the case, then he gave his finding.

"If Dick was drowned out there, where would his body be now?"

"Across the lake," retorted Bull Harris at once. "Across there where she narrers down and the river begins agin. Might even find him hung up in the Lynx Rapids. They're low enough fer that."

Steve turned to Pug Blake.

"How about it, Pug? Shall we go across and take a look?"

"You betcha life!" responded the man without hesitation. "Should have been done a week ago.

Bull Harris spoke to the man who was traveling with him.

"All right, Tad. Get them dogs swung around. We'll go and see what we can. If only," he added, "to keep this yap's mouth shut."

CHAPTER II
Treachery or Accident?

THE four dog-trains started off on a circle of the lake, making for the far end and the resumption of Devil's River. On the way they passed Crow Island. Bull Harris called a stop.

"While we're here, I'm goin' to show yuh where we camped." He left his dogs and headed for the bush. The others followed him.

"There now," he said at length, pointing out a camping-place. "That's where we put in the night. See! My bed here and Tad's there." He was indicating the spruce-tips cut and spread in the snow. "And that jam can there. We chucked it away after we had supper."

Steve nodded. "Seems O.K.," he agreed. Pug grunted non-commitantly.

Again they turned toward the lake-shore and their dogs. And again Bull stopped. He pointed suddenly toward Spruce Island.

"Ain't that what I was tellin' yuh? Take a look at 'er—open water all around!" He gave Pug a murderously sneering glance.

It was true. There was the snow-covered ice running to within fifty yards of Spruce Island's rocky shores, and after that the grayish-green water of mid-winter.

"Satisfied?" he sneered again to Pug. "I ain't got no canoe cached away in my grub-box!"

On again. And in the Lynx Rapids they found the body of Dick Dutton, jammed between two rocks at the rapid's foot. One arm swung in the suction of the current. Wavy black hair streaked away like seaweed.

Bull Harris made no attempt to hide his satisfaction and relief.

"There y'are now," he challenged. "Mebbe that lets me out?"

Steve looked at him levelly. "Did I ever doubt your story?"

"No. But that there runt did."

They loaded the body onto Pug Blake's sleigh and covered it with a canvas tarp. Then Steve put his suggestion.

"I'm heading north, myself, but there's no great rush. How'd it be if I went back to town with you boys?"

Bull Harris gave a short grunt. Plainly the idea did not suit him. But Pug Blake jumped at it.

"Sure. Come on! Dick, here," indicating the load on his sleigh, "ain't so much company now. But I'd just as soon have him as these other two."

It was a thirty-mile trip to Galena City, and night had long fallen when they arrived. Bull Harris and Tad Schmidt headed into the Lucky Strike Poolroom without so much as a final word of farewell.

Once they had gone, Pug turned to Steve.

"You were a real pal to me up on Spirit Lake. Wonder if you'd do me one more favor?"

"Sure. What is it?"

Pug hedged. "It's about Dick here."

"Well?"

"Come on down to my place with me. I've got to break the news to his sister. And I just can't do it alone."

PUG BLAKE'S house was a rambling bungalow on the outskirts of town. There Steve met Pug's wife, a gentle-faced, refined girl on the sunny side of twenty-five, a type altogether different to the roughneck Pug himself.

She came on them in the hallway of the house.

"Larry!" she gasped. "Your face!"

"Nem'mind," evaded Pug, awkwardly. "Where's Mollie?"

His wife frowned. "Mollie? Why?"

Pug swallowed hard. Drew her close to him.

"Dick . . . Dick's dead. Got to tell her."

Just at that moment another girl came from an adjoining room. Steve caught a glimpse of a tall, slim figure, a wealth of sun-gold hair and two wondering eyes. Then he looked away. He had to. He couldn't watch the falling of the blow.

"Somebody asking for me?"

He felt her glance resting on him. Then heard Pug's voice.

"Let's go in the sitting-room."

"Why . . .?" There was a faltering note in the girl's voice. Mrs. Blake slipped an arm about her shoulders and led her through the doorway. Pug grabbed Steve almost fiercely.

"You tell her. If you don't, I'll make a bolt for it!"

Within they stopped. Steve forced himself to look up. Saw the wide-eyed expression on the girl's face. It was a look of perplexity; like a child might wear who had been punished and failed to know the reason for it.

Steve drew a breath. "You must be brave, Mollie,"—and failed to notice the use of her first name—"It's about Dick. . . . He's dead."

The words were stark. Brutal. But their very brutality softened the barb. The girl stood motionless; just as though carved from stone.

"He drowned in Spirit Lake," continued Steve, gently. "We've just brought him in."

It seemed an age till the girl spoke.

"Where . . . where is he?" she asked. Her voice was barely audible.

"Mr. Blake has him outside on his sleigh"

Mollie Dutton's eyes closed. She seemed to sway.

"I must be brave . . ." she began. "But Dick . . . Dick . . .!"

Mrs. Blake caught her; led her to a nearby lounge. Took her head on her shoulder.

"You poor child. There!"

Pug nudged Steve once more.

"C'mon!"

THE man led the way outside to where the harnessed dogs were waiting.

"Well, Dick, old timer," he muttered to the canvas-covered figure on his sleigh, "guess it's the warehouse for you tonight." Then to Steve he said, "Lend a hand and we'll put him away. No good worrying the girl tonight about the funeral. Tomorrow's lots of time for that."

They placed the body of Dick Dutton on the warehouse floor, locked the door securely and loosened their dogs. Again Pug spoke.

"Come on in the house till I boil a cup of coffee. You can stand one, and I'm blamed sure I can."

Later, as the fire crackled, Pug began to fill his pipe. From the adjoining room came the soothing voice of his wife; the soft sobbing of the girl. Pug ground his teeth.

"Beats hell, don't it?" he growled.

"Sure does." Steve was rolling a cigarette with slow deliberation. "And I wish I knew what was back of it all."

"Don't I?" Pug lit his pipe and suddenly raised his eyes. "D'you know," he said; "you haven't even told me your name?"

"Barrett," supplied Steve. "And Steve to my friends."

"Well, you know mine anyway," pointed out Pug and extended his hand. "Kinda late for introductions; but things moved a bit swift today."

They shook. Then Steve came down to facts.

"Who is this Bull Harris, anyway?"

"Who is he?" grunted Pug. "I can tell you that in about two minutes. Bull Harris is the big noise in Galena City, the high-low-jack-and-the-game. Runs the Lucky Strike bootleg-joint and calls himself a mining-man. I don't know much about that part of it, but if it means a big four-flusher and a tinhorn crook, he's a mining-man with two big m's. Where he came from I don't know. Blew in here 'bout four years ago."

Steve digested this. "He didn't lose much time taking that crack at you up at the Lake."

"He was glad of the chance. We've locked horns before, and he knows just what I think of him. But it was only today that it came to the showdown."

"But what makes you think," asked Steve after a pause, "that Dick's death wasn't an accident?"

"I don't know," returned Pug. "Bull Harris had everything to gain if Dick did die. And after he'd staked the claim, you notice he grabbed the whole thing for himself. He got what he wanted."

"Did Dick actually return for the grub or the dog-feed that Bull mentioned?"

"Sure. And did you notice how he flushed up when you pinned that little mistake on him?"

Steve shrugged. "But that doesn't signify much as long as Dick really did come back. I only shot Bull that question to see how he'd react. And he did react, bad. He wasn't sure but what he'd pulled a boner somewhere. I could see it in his eyes."

The water boiled on the stove. Pug made coffee, and the men drank a couple of cups apiece. Then Steve stood up and began to loop his parka.

"Think I'll take a mosey up to the Lucky Strike. I'm no more satisfied than you are about Dick's end. It won't hurt to keep Mr. Bull Harris under observation for a while."

But Pug stood up too. "Ain't nothing for me to do here. While Mollie's all knocked out like that, I'm better out of the way.

He pulled on his cap and followed Steve from the room.

CHAPTER III
Shadowed

A TYPICAL honky-tonk, the Lucky Strike; gambling-dive, dance-hall and bootleg saloon. Until the Law came to rule Galena City in the form of a scarlet tunic and a Colt .455, the Lucky Strike would continue to do a roaring trade.

When Steve and Pug Blake entered the place it was already in its stride. Here were gathered the birds of the night: the crew from the mine; prospectors and trappers; an odd Indian or a breed. In one corner, a three-way fight was going on. In another, the sallow-faced jazz-hound ripped a tinpanny tune from the piano. There were whoops and yells; a scream of laughter from a kalsomined dancing-girl; a burst of profanity that seared like fire. . . . The Lucky Strike was well away.

Through the tobacco smoke that streaked beneath the hanging lamps, Steve saw Bull Harris leaning against the bar. He was still dressed for the trail and Tad Schmidt was by his side. Both men held half-full glasses in their hands. Steve chose a couple of seats nearby; sat down to study Bull Harris at leisure.

It was soon evident that Bull Harris had drunk too much. He swayed on his feet and wiped his beard with the back of his hairy hand. Steve saw Tad Schmidt looking their way, and caught the man mumbling out of the corner of his mouth. Then Bull Harris turned toward Steve.

He blinked, scowled; weaved over to where they were sitting.

"What's the big idea?" he snarled, thickly. "Shadderin' me, or something?"

Steve smiled, a bit. "What would we 'shadow' you for? Fact is, we wanted some place to go, and this was as good as any."

But Bull Harris refused to be mollified.

"Just because yuh slammed me once, when I wasn't lookin'. . . ."

Steve got out of his chair, lazily.

"What's that again?" he drawled.

Bull repeated it. ". . . when I wasn't lookin'. . . ."

"Are you lookin' now?" Steve rapped out the question.

FOR a moment the half-drunk Bull seemed to find his senses. He glared at Steve; made a motion to unbutton his mackinaw; dropped his hand again.

"Say!" he said harshly. "Ever hear of the bird that monkeyed with the buzz-saw?"

"No," innocently. "What happened?"

"He got hurt—bad!"

Steve was actually smiling now. "Did, eh? But what's that to me?"

Then Pug Blake shoved in.

"Come on, Steve. Let's get outa here. He ain't got guts enough to tackle you, but he'll sic his jackals on you if we stick around. We'll beat it."

"Yuh betcha life yuh will!" roared Bull Harris. "This is my dump, and I'm tellin' yuh; get out an' stay out!"

He made a move forward. And Steve did not back up. For a long half-minute he stood there, studying Bull Harris. There was a look of almost unbelief on his face. He stood there, just staring. Then Pug nudged him.

"Steve, come on!"

Steve seemed to shake himself awake. "Yeh, I guess we'll go," he said at length. "Yeh. We'll go."

The words were mechanical, almost as though Steve did not know he was saying them. Pug looked at him sharply; then headed for the door.

Outside, they turned down the street.

"I'll get that baby!" swore Pug. "You may think me crazy, but as sure as I've got feet on the end of my legs, he knows more about Dick Dutton's death than he wants to tell."

Steve stopped abruptly.

"I'm going back," he stated.

"What?" Pug had stopped, now, too. He was trying to read Steve's face in the darkness. "Say . . . what's up, Steve?"

"I'm going back, I tell you. I want another squint at Bull Harris. He makes me think of something I forgot."

WITHOUT another word he wheeled in his tracks. A minute later both men were in the Lucky Strike once more.

Bull Harris was leaning over the bar at the end of the room. So far he wasn't aware of their entrance. Steve sat down in the shadow of one of the upright beams and drew a wallet from an inside pocket.

Almost stealthily he opened the wallet and produced four well-thumbed photographs.

To one who knew—and Pug beside him knew—they were replicas from a police rogues-gallery. All were of a numbered man, some in profile, some full-faced. Steve selected one of the latter and fished a bit of pencil from another pocket.

Still stealthily, so that none should see him, he began to sketch a beard and a fur cap on the photograph in his hand. A beard and a cap like Bull Harris was wearing. When he had it finished he compared it with Bull.

Pug failed to grasp the full meaning of it all, but, leaning over Steve's shoulder, he caught a sharp breath.

"Gosh!" he gasped. "Him!"

Steve put the wallet away. He stood up and smiled thinly.

BACK in the kitchen of the Blake house, Steve smoked his fourth cigarette and drank his third cup of

warmed-over coffee. At length Pug broke the long silence.

"Been trying to dope you out all day, Steve. Couldn't place you." Then, abruptly: "What's the rank—corporal or full-blown buck?"

"You're good," admitted Steve. "Guess those photos gave me away. The rank is sergeant."

"So?" Pug's eyes held a certain respect. "But why ain't you wearing the red."

"Because," answered Steve slowly, "for four years I've been looking for the gent whose photo you saw."

Pug whistled. "And today you found him."

"Today I found him."

Steve rolled another cigarette; lit it from the butt of the one he had been smoking and flicked the butt toward the stove.

"By the way," he asked, irrelevantly. "When will Bull Harris record that claim he staked?"

Pug frowned to himself. "Well. . . . If he wants to record, it means a trip to Black River. That's the nearest office, though it's two hundred miles away. He ain't likely to make the trip by dogs, so he'll take the once-a-week train next Friday."

"Hmm." Steve chewed this over. "Would you have time to follow Bull's tracks north and re-stake those claims?"

"Would I what?"

Pug could not seem to understand.

Steve repeated his question.

"It isn't apt to snow for a few days. You can go up and stake 'em again in the name of Mollie Dutton?"

"But—" floundered Pug. "What about Bull?"

"He won't need 'em?"

"Why?"

"Because," answered Steve dryly; "if all goes well Bull Harris will hang."

"Eh?" Pug Blake shot forward in his chair. "You mean for bumpin' young Dick?"

"No; not necessarily. For something older than that."

STEVE blew the ash from his cigarette; studied the end carefully; began to speak again. "I shouldn't give away police secrets, Pug, but I'll let you in on this. Bull Harris, though his name was 'Miller' then, served seven years for bank-robbery up in Northern British Columbia in nineteen-twelve."

"Bull did?"

"Yes. He could have got away with the robbery, too, but for one man. That man, Kootenay Jim they called him, happened to walk into the bank as Miller, as I know him, was backing out. Kootenay socked him under the ear, knocked him flat and turned him over to the village cop."

Steve paused. Pug waited. "Yeah?" he prompted at last.

"Four years ago, Kootenay Jim was trapping on the Little Smoky. Some Indians walked into his shack one day and found him—dead. He was stretched out on the bunk with a bluish hole between his eyes and his hand hanging down to the floor. A Luger pistol was on the floor, too; just as though it had slipped from his stiffening fingers."

"Suicide, eh?"

"Yeah," drily. "That's what the inquest said. But two months before Kootenay Jim died he wrote a letter—it's on file at the Barracks in Victoria—saying that he had seen someone like Miller or Harris—around the Post at Snowshoe Lake. He said that Miller's time was up and that he had a hunch that Miller was hunting for him. Went on to say that there might be nothing to it, but, if anything *did* happen to him, to check Miller up. And that's been my special job from that day to this—to 'check Miller up.'"

Pug leaned back in his chair. "Well; looks as though Kootenay Jim had the goods on Miller. But you ain't got proof."

"No? When the time comes I'll have the proof—or the next best thing."

Pug stirred. "Then you figure on arrestin' Bull?"

"I sure do. Quietly; in the morning."

"And I'll sure stake," returned Pug. "But," he put in hastily, "while I think of it: watch him! He used to go heeled all the time, and he may do now."

"I believe you," answered Steve. "Did you notice him tonight when I jumped him? He made as though he was going to shed his coat."

"I saw him. But what about it?"

"Shoulder-holster, or I'm a Chink," stated Steve.

Then he stood up.

"Guess I'll go hunt a flop some place."

"You will in a pig's ear," shot back Pug. "When Mollie quietens down, use that couch. You're stayin' right here."

"I don't know about that," demurred Steve. "I've been on the trail all winter. Smell of smoke like an Indian."

"What of that?" scorned Pug. "Gimme a week on the trap-line, and I ain't no bunch o' honeysuckle myself. The town's out-of-bounds for you tonight."

CHAPTER IV
Fire on Spruce Island

AS Steve had expected, there was no sign of Mollie Dutton at breakfast the next morning, but as he was rising from the table, she walked into the room.

Steve first noticed the almost transparent pallor of her skin and the heavy black rings beneath her eyes. Then she was offering him her hand.

"Thank you, Mr. Barrett, for what you have done for me. I appreciate it deeply."

Slim took the slender fingers, and bowed.

"My only regret is that I could do no more." Then the girl electrified him.

"But having been on the spot, as it were, do you think Dick's death was an accident?"

Steve tried to avoid her eyes.

"I'm afraid I can't form an opinion, Miss Dutton. But if it is any satisfaction to you I may say that I know the man he was traveling with. If Dick's death wasn't an accident, Bull Harris would be a good man to suspect."

"Why do you say that?"

It was a direct question. And Steve knew he could not lie to this girl.

"Mr. Blake is the only man who knows it, Miss Dutton, but I am a Mounted Policeman. I am arresting Bull Harris today."

"On the capital charge?"

Somehow this girl was reading his thoughts. Steve regretted his foolishness in saying as much as he had.

"Yes. But not on Dick's account. This is a previous affair; one concerning a certain Kootenay Jim." But he put in hastily: "And we may even yet get at the truth regarding Dick's fate. We have Tad Schmidt to work on."

The girl began to speak on a different matter.

"When do you wish to . . . to bury Dick?"

She was trying to keep up a plucky front, but tears filled her eyes.

"That is for you to decide," returned Steve. "I was thinking that possibly you might like to take him out to civilization and home."

"But we have no home. Dick was . . . was all I had."

Then the girl broke down completely. She hurried from the room, Mrs. Blake following her.

Pug spoke up. "Better get it over, quick. What's wrong with burying him today? Right now? The town's got a cemetery of sorts."

Steve agreed, and Pug moved into the next room to put his proposition forward.

SO it was. In the raw cold of a whining east wind, Steve read the short service for the dead. Then the mourners and spectators dispersed. Miners, prospectors and the curious 'breeds went back to their work or their loafing; Mollie Dutton to Pug Blake's house and the lonely outlook before her.

Then Steve turned to Pug.

"Now you hook-in and beat it. That wind feels like snow, and if you're going to track Bull Harris to those claims, you'll need to drive."

"Suits me," agreed Pug. "And anyway, I've got a hunch I want to try out. A scheme for proving whether Dick was murdered or not."

Steve looked at him curiously.

"And I'm not in on it?"

"Not till I know a bit more."

"Well—go ahead."

At Pug's departure, Steve entered the house. The front room was unoccupied, so at the table he opened his valise and got out materials for writing.

The letter he addressed to the Officer Commanding, Royal Canadian Mounted Police at Prince Albert, and it was terse and to the point.

". . . I have definitely established the fact that Bull Harris of Galena City is none other than Charlie Miller, wanted for the murder of Kootenay Jim. I am now on the point of arresting him. He is a dangerous character, and there is the chance that the arrest may not turn out as I hope. In case I fail, please send another man in immediately to take up the Harris case. He thinks himself safe; hence there should be no great trouble in taking him into custody if proper precautions are made. . . ."

Steve laid pen and ink to one side and stood up. Just then there came a knock at the door. He opened it to see a man standing there.

"You're a pal o' Pug's, aincha?" asked the man.

"I hope so," answered Steve, frowning.

"And Steve 's gone up the Spirit Lake trail. But there's more'n that worrying me. Tad Schmidt and a coupla other birds are following him."

Steve was still frowning when Mrs. Blake passed the door. He called her back. "Do you know this gentleman?" he asked.

The woman smiled. "Certainly. It's Mr. Short, the Postmaster."

Steve's frown was replaced by a quick smile.

"All right, old boy." Suddenly he straightened. "Thanks for the tip. Thanks, a lot."

He re-entered the room he had left, addressed the letter and then prepared for the trail.

Mrs. Blake watched him as he hitched in his dogs.

"Going far?"

"Just as far as Spirit Lake," replied Steve. "Pug had a hunch, and so have I."

IT was nearly ten o'clock. Spirit Lake lay a good thirty miles distant and a scant five hours of daylight remained. Once clear of the town he shook the dogs into a steady trot. Miles dropped behind; with them the tamarack-swamps and jackpine ridges. It was cold; the raw wind was strengthening. Sullen, low-lying clouds banked in the east. Noon came but he didn't stop to boil; then evening. An hour later, darkness, with a half-moon striving to penetrate the murk.

Steve was nearing his destination. Came a marshy part of the river. The dry reeds along the shore shivered as the wind went through them; rattled like a skeleton's bones.

So far there had been no sign of Pug; no sign of the three men who were reputed to be following him. Steve was growing uneasy.

Another twist of the river. Spirit Lake spread out before him.

The huskies were quickening their pace; the leader whining eagerly. Suddenly, before Steve could check them, they had swerved from the trail. Instead of making for the bush and the direction of Crow Island, they struck straight across the lake, due for Spruce Island and open water.

With a frenzied yell, Steve left the sleigh. He grabbed the headline and yanked them to a stop. Swung his whip and beat them back to the trail again. Once there he turned and looked toward the weak ice he had so narrowly missed. And, of a sudden, the blood froze in his veins.

Out there on Spruce Island a fire was burning!

HE began to shiver, and it was not from the cold. In the last two minutes he had stepped into the jaws of death and out of them again. Right now he was the luckiest man in the world. Had he been asleep in his sleigh, dozing even, when the dogs hit the lake-front, no power on earth could have saved him. He'd have been a dead man; a drowned corpse. Gone the way that young Dick Dutton had gone.

But the shock passed. His mind came back to the reality. Who lit that fire on Spruce Island?

Only yesterday, with his own eyes, he had seen the place. Then there had been water all around it. Now, thirty hours later and if the fire meant anything at all, somebody had performed the impossible: crossed the treacherous ice and the intervening water. But how?

The dogs were straining in their harness, keen to be off. They seemed to understand something that was denied to the man.

"Marche!" yelled Steve, and gave them their heads.

They struck along the trail at a fast clip. Steve sprang for the tail of the sleigh. And as he rode he turned his head toward that glimmer of fire out on the lake.

He began to frown; his brows drew into a straight line. For now the fire was not where he had first seen it. It flickered. Came into sight and vanished again. Moved down the island's length.

Then the truth struck him like a dash of cold water. It was not on the island at all, but on the far shore, due behind!

AT once the workings of a hellish scheme lay bare. Dick Dutton's death *was* a preconceived plan. The kid had been sent back for the dogfeed that had been left on purpose. And Bull Harris, after establishing a bomb-proof alibi on Crow Island, had built that decoy fire across the lake.

Neat. Subtle. Steve acknowledged that. And Bull Harris was still sitting safe. No judge, no jury in the land would hang Bull Harris on this evidence alone. Bull would swear that the fire was not his.

No proof that Dick Dutton's death was other than accidental. No proof that Kootenay Jim had died by a killer's hand. Bull Harris was good!

But the dogs were speeding on. They had now passed Crow Island; were circling the lake and making for the fire. Steve did not check them. Their eagerness was not more keen than his.

A mile; two. Two and a half. He was getting close. No longer was that fire so indistinct. He could make out its exact position; up on the bank overlooking the lake. He could see the trees that encircled it and distinguish spruce from birch.

The leader yelped. Between himself and the fire Steve saw something move. It was a man . . . three men. They were almost on him. . . .

He dived for the carbine lying in the sleigh. Something caught him a crashing jar on the side of the head. He fell back, half-stunned but threw himself free. A man tripped over him and went down. Steve's brain was beginning to clear and he tried for the gun again.

From ahead came the roars and yelps of frenzied dogs. His own train had collided with another. They were fighting it out to the death.

Steve saw the blurred outline of a man. He struck at it blindly and heard a bubbling grunt. Oaths, curses; the scream of a dying dog. . . . Steve lunged again; an arm went around his neck A crunching blow. . . . Darkness.

CHAPTER V
The Noose Slips

HE was numbed; dizzy. A wet nose nuzzled against his cheek. His leader howled mournfully.

Steve lifted his head. Around him was darkness, impenetrable. Then he caught the faint flicker of the fire.

Something like understanding came to him and he dragged himself into the sleigh.

"Marche!" he yelled hoarsely, and the dogs moved off. But they were miserably tangled in their harness. One of them could scarcely walk. Somehow he got out ahead of them and led the way. It took him ten minutes to make the fifty yards, then he left the dogs and crawled up the bank.

The fire was almost gone, but sprawled out in front of it he saw the face-down figure of Pug Blake. A whine from the far side of the fire showed him Pug's dogs tethered to a tree.

Weak though he was, the shock of seeing Pug acted as a stimulant. He bent down and rolled the man onto his back.

Blood clotted Pug's hair; his forehead; half of his face. His eyes were closed and he looked as dead as ever man did. But Steve ripped open his coat and shirt and placed a hand over Pug's heart.

"Alive!"

Back to his dogs he went, dug out his tea-kettle and grub-box and returned to the fire. From snow he thawed water and brewed tea. Got a cup and forced some of the scalding liquid into Pug's mouth. It ran out again; and again he persisted. At last Pug drew a deep breath and opened his eyes.

The man was conscious but it took some minutes for Steve to make him really awake to his surroundings. Then he asked him a question.

"What happened? Some fellers jump you, or something?"

"Eh? Pug blinked, looked about him strangely and sat up. "Wow! What the devil's the matter with my head?" He put up a hand to find out, but winced when he touched his scalp.

Steve explored and found a long furrow of a wound running halfway across his skull.

"Somebody shot you, didn't they?"

"Gosh, yes! I remember now. Tad Schmidt and some other eggs. . . . "I'd just got the fire built up when they lit on me."

Now that his patient was definitely here to stay, Steve helped himself to the tea.

"The same bunch tied into me. One of 'em must have laid me out with a broad-axe—or that's the way I feel."

He shuddered again with the pain.

Pug seemed to be delving into the past. "I get it now! That hunch of mine was that Bull Harris built a fire right here some place to trick young Dick. I had just got the fire started and was going back to see how it looked, when the fun began."

Steve grinned queerly.

"It looked fine. You darn near snared me!"

"That so? Then my hunch was right. . . . Say!" he suddenly exploded; "where are those birds that beat us up? Off to town to warn Bull!"

Steve clambered to his feet. "And heaven knows how long a start they've got. I'm off!" He started down the bank, pausing only long enough to throw one order to Pug. "Don't forget about those claims. Beat it as soon as you can."

And Pug answered:

"Cheerio!"

BUT Steve failed to overtake Tad Schmidt. On the outskirts of Galena City he swung into a little used road and made straight for Pug's house.

Nobody was about when he arrived. In the room he had occupied he opened his kit-bag. From it he took a pair of handcuffs and a worn and shiny police .455 in a hip-holster. The gun he buckled on beneath his parka. The handcuffs he slipped into a pocket.

Then there came a creak from an adjoining room. As he stepped out he met Pug's wife, already dressed.

He gave her a short explanation.

"I left Larry up on Spirit Lake. He's

going to re-stake those claims for Mollie."

His gun was showing beneath his parka. Mrs. Blake looked from it to his hard-set face.

"And you?"

"I'm going after Bull Harris. We know now that Dick's death was murder."

The woman seemed to recoil.

"But . . . but, you're not going alone? Wait till Larry comes back. Bull Harris is a treacherous snake."

Steve was smiling, with his teeth.

"It'll be all right. I've been following Bull Harris for four years. My commanding officer gave me the job at my special request. There's nothing to worry about." Then, oddly, he finished: "I've left a letter in my room. If I don't get back or anything happens, try to rush it off as soon as you can."

And with that he stepped out of the door.

HALFWAY to the Lucky Strike he met Short, the Postmaster.

"Seen anything of Bull Harris?" he asked him.

"Why, sure," was the ready answer. "Just seen him and Tad Schmidt going into that poolroom of his. Seemed in a hurry, both of 'em. Why; anything up?"

"Not yet," answered Steve. "But there may be."

Steve did not wait. Toward the poolroom-saloon he hurried and walked inside.

It was too early for any patrons to be around, and at first glance Steve thought the place deserted. There was no one at the bar, but from the open door behind it came the sounds of men talking. On tiptoe he made the length of the hall, slid out of his parka and let it fall to the floor. Then around the bar he went, making for that rear room.

His step was cat-like. The Indian moccasins on his feet made no sound. Thus he was able to face Bull Harris and Tad Schmidt before either of the two were aware of his presence.

Harris was dressed for the trail in mackinaws and cap. Tad Schmidt was holding a sack into which Harris was stuffing an eiderdown-robe.

He frowned. Looked up. Went suddenly tense. Then his eyes took in the gun tied down to Steve's right thigh.

BULL Harris licked his lips.

"What are you after?" he demanded thickly. He looked like a rattler set to strike; like a lynx ready to spring. And all that held him motionless were the tight-drawn eyes of the man before him. Then Steve began to speak in a voice of death.

"I want . . . I want a lot of things. For one, I'd like to know how you figured out that fire-trap for Dick Dutton on Spirit Lake."

Bull Harris seemed to cringe—or was he settling into the gunman's pose? Steve's passionless voice was a taunt; a hint of what was to come.

"Another thing I'd like to know is the how-come of Kootenay Jim's passing on."

It was a smashing blow for Bull Harris. Almost it seemed he had been expecting an interrogation in regard to Dick Dutton. But at the mention of Kootenay Jim his very flesh seemed to creep. Jaw-muscles ran into little knots beneath his beard. His fingers tightened spasmodically.

"You're not talking?" Again the taunt. Steve's face was as gray as tallow. "Then I'll tell you something. Kootenay Jim knew he was under the shadow. He wrote and said that a bird named Miller was gunning for him. Then Jim shot himself—so they said. But I'm asking you this: how could Jim shoot himself by a revolver in his right hand when he had a stiff elbow. Or don't you know, Bull Harris"—Steve's voice was almost choking him now—"that Jim's right arm was smashed in the second battle of the Somme?"

Bull Harris drew; a fumbling, desperate draw from the shoulder-holster beneath his arm. A bullet smashed

across the room as Steve went down on his face. Tad Schmidt sprang from range, a scream of terror breaking from his throat.

Bull Harris was firing his second bullet as Steve fired his first. Two shots roared out. Two that blended as one.

Then no more.

And Steve threw himself to one side as the body of Bull Harris thrashed down. . . .

Then Steve stood up. In his hand was the smoking .455.

Four years of still-hunting. Four years of following dim trails. And Bull Harris had slipped through the hangman's noose at last. But the sacred law of the Force had been fulfilled. The other man had fired the first shot.

HE came back to Pug Blake's house. He walked slowly. His shoulders seemed to sag.

Mrs. Blake met him at the door. Behind her was Mollie Dutton. There was no mistaking the thankfulness in the girl's eyes. Steve suddenly realized that it was good to be alive after all.

"Did you. . . ." Mrs. Blake balked at the question. Steve was glad that he didn't have to answer it.

For a moment a heavy silence fell. Then Mollie Dutton lowered her head and began to sob.

Steve pushed through. Put a gentle hand on her shoulder.

"Don't grieve any more, girl. They'll sleep in peace tonight—your brother and mine."

THE END

BLOOD ON THE SNOW

THE ice-laden wheels of justice in the Far North move more slowly but just as surely as the theoretically smoother-action justice-wheels of civilization. The floating patrol schooner *St. Roch* was detailed to round up three murderers on its first Arctic trip: an Indian girl charged with doing away with her own child; Isyumatok, an Eskimo woman, probably guilty of killing her husband; and a third Eskimo named Oksuk, held on a charge similar in character to those of the other two. It took months of search and careful inquiry into the facts on the part of the Mounties to bring these criminals to trial. The trials themselves took place on the floating court, the *Distributor,* on its first trip down the MacKenzie River. Principals and witnesses in the three cases were taken to Herschel Island to await the arrival of the big "law canoe." All this was a big task done thoroughly, handled with the competence one always associates with the R. C. M. P.

HORSES CAN'T TALK

By MILES OVERHOLT

Author of "The Talking Lake," "The Badman Buster," etc.

WEST—Dad Gary's pinto knew all about a gold mine. Hap and Shady begged her for the lowdown, but that danged mustang only snorted hawss-talk at 'em an' wouldn't play along, none at all.

"DAD" GARY, with two bullet holes in him, was picked up by the stage driver from San Lucia and brought into Los Bolo.

Dad revived, after a couple of drinks of whiskey, and whispered the name of "Shady" Lane. Shady and I went over to Doc White's office and not any too soon. The old prospector was calling it a day.

"Some hombre shot me—in the back—took sack o' nuggets—want yuh to have mine—rich—find pinto pony—cayuse—has information—where mine is—find pon—"

That was all the old desert rat managed to gasp before he went on away from here.

And that's how much good it does you to get rich. You die and somebody else spends the wealth. Or they kill you for it, maybe. Or you have to spend half yore time practicing to go through the eye of a needle. Or whatever it is you have to do.

Seemed that some miscreant had figgered Dad had some wealthy nuggets, taken from his secret mine, and had up and punctured his tires while he was heading into town for some much-needed refreshments.

The old prospector was stripped of everything, including his pinto pony which he used as a pack animal, and the next question before the meeting was: Where at was the pinto?

"Even if we find the dang mustang, how we goin' to get him to tell us where at is the mine?" I asked Shady Lane in a rhetorical manner.

"I pass," Shady said. "I never indulged in no talkin' hawses none. 'Specially them that has become miners."

"Maybe he talks with his feet, like the trained cayuses you see in circuses," I reminded my addled friend. "Only we don't know what to ask him."

"Shucks, yuh can't say: 'How old are yuh?' and get no information about a lost mine," Shady argued. And dog-goned if he wasn't right.

"But the first thing to do is to find the hawse," I said. "Where at would you say the pony was sojournin'?"

"We have to figger that out by reasonin' an' deduction an' elimination, Watson," said Shady. "It's purely elemental, my dear feller."

"Yeah; danged if you ain't right," I agreed. "Whatever it is you're talkin' about. Now, my idea is that you got to figger you're a hawse an' go where you'd go if you was a hawse."

"Shore sounds simple," admitted Shady. "Yuh be the hawse an' do the figgerin'."

So I tried to make myself believe I was a hawse, but I didn't get no results.

"I guess I'm the wrong kinda hawse," I said, after I couldn't think where I was. "Maybe I'm a hawse of another color."

So we didn't do anything at all by the various processes Shady had mapped out for us to foller. The next best thing to do was to go and see if we couldn't trail the pony.

WHICH is what we set out to accomplish all on a summer's day. We found where Jeff Ogge had picked Dad Gary up, and went out there and looked for tracks. And we woulda found some, only a band of sheep had been drove over the spot and that left the entire situation in bad odor.

But we was as determined as a feller learnin' to become a husband to a rich wife, and we went back to town and got us some grub and a pack animal, and again went forth into the wilderness where the cayote howleth and the vipers rattleth.

Nobody knowed where old Dad Gary had done his prospectin', except that it was somewheres around the Funeral mountains, and that is the vicinity we livened up with our mere presences.

We figgered that some local bandit had shot up our old friend, a prospector, maybe, and we might run acrost him somehow. It was kinda unsatisfactory and like looking for a noodle in a hey-hey stack, but it was the best thing we could do till we thought up something better.

We found a spring six or seven miles south of a given point, which given point was a cow habitation, and set up a camp there among the lush grass, and gave ourselves over to deep thought and concentration and other mental ailments.

But I defy any man to sit in the shade of a manzanita tree and bring a pinto pony to life right before his very eyes. I doubt if anybody could do it. Not while he was sober, I mean. And that is one of the several things that was the matter with us.

"Shucks, we gotta get active," Shady said on the afternoon of the second day. "Activity," he explained, "is the soul of wit. And we shore need plenty of wit to find this here dang pony."

After which we throwed the hulls on our broncs, which hated to leave all that good grass, and rode forth into the broad light of day a-seeking the pony that pintoes and the hawse that can't change his spots.

"But he shore changed 'em," Shady argued, after I had mentioned the fact that he couldn't. "Anyways, he ain't in the spot he was."

Which was too true to admit of further conversation for maybe an hour or more.

AND then from the top of a hill overlooking the Packsaddle ranch we done saw us a hawse that had all the markings of the animal we was a-seeking. So we rode closter and saw him some more.

Yes, ma'am, there was a calico pony basking in the summer sun right there in the pasture, and as we neared him, on the outside of the fence, we could see packsaddle marks on his back. So we reached forth and shook hands with each other, and wunked a long, knowing wink.

Words are plumb idle when a couple of gents set out to steal a pinto mustang. We figgered that the pony belonged to us, anyway, and the only way we could get it would be to take it outa the pasture in a surreptitious and unwarranted manner.

We mighta bought it off'n the rancher, only what was we going to use for money?

So we waited till dark and then again rode forth on an errand of mussy. At least we mussed up that barb wire fence a good deal and the rest of the stock in the pasture, but we got the pony.

We hazed the broncs to the further end of the pasture away from the ranch houses and got 'em in a corner. Then we roped out the hawse we wanted there in the moonlight and led him triumphantly through the hole we had cut in the fence, like a couple of thieves in the night. Almost exactly like a couple of thieves in the etc.

Oh, yeah, we had been quiet and mouse-like and surreptitious and stealthy and all them items in sequence. Yeah, we musta been.

Because we picketed the bronc right clost to our camp and then went to bed to glean us a harvest of slumber so's we'd be fresh and full of keen perception the next morning. We wanted to start in learnin' the hawse language, and that takes hawse sense, at least.

BUT we got up a trifle earlier than we intended to when a coupla interested hunks of leaden fatality thudded into the ground right clost to our whereabouts and made theirselves a nest.

We kinda shed them bedclothes like they was irritatin' our quivering flesh, and slithered behind a coupla trees and unlimbered our hawg-laigs and waited to see what was we goin' to slaughter. We thought maybe we had been attacked by a nightmare.

But it was plumb daylight, so it couldn't have been that, we figured, after awhile. More bullets began humming a merry little death song, and we saw a coupla riders dash down into a coulee a little ways west of the spot where it woulda been a good place to bury a coupla hawse thieves.

Then Shady slammed a coupla leaden markers into the place where a man woulda been standing if he had kept standing, and I got me a hawse that another feller was riding. I didn't want the dang pony, but there he was.

The pinto was scared, what with the early morning rattle of musketry and all, and was tugging at the picket rope, and it was a plumb unsatisfactory beginning of the day all around.

We heard one feller holler to another'n:

"Them's the thieves, all right. Thar's the cayuse!"

Then—wham!

A flock of bullets punctuated the remark with exclamation points, question marks and semi-colons.

I took me a coupla whams at the smoke coming from a nearby rock and a cow-hand yelled very unhappily, and Shady said that was the way to accomplish the task of defending our loquacious piece of hawse-flesh.

Then I grabbed a brief look at my undressed friend behind the next tree to mine, and saw blood flowing down his arm. Shady grinned.

"Scratched me up some," he said, whanging another hunk of something pestilential at an exposed haid.

The haid bobbed down and said nothing. And I began to try to figger out how many gents was trying to wake up so early in the dewy morn. It looked as though there was maybe six or seven punchers, slathering us with little messengers of disaster, and that wasn't fair, but they was the facts in a nutshell.

But we kept sending out insultin' leaden remarks toward our unexpected guests, and they answered us right back very whole-heartedly. And there is no telling what woulda happened if something hadn't happened to change our line of thought. The chances are we woulda been surrounded on all sides and made

dizzy running around them trees till we fell down, or something, if a bullet hadn't accidently struck that taut rope being pulled by the pinto.

YES, ma'am, it was some kinda luck that caused that bullet to cut the picket rope spang in two, and the pony, being free, galloped down the gulch, almost in the line of fire, the dang little fool, and there was a kinda cry of exultation, or triumph, as the feller says, and the shooting stopped.

"Aw, that's enough," somebody said. "We got Jane's pony back, an' three wounded men. Let's high-tail it."

Which was the episode that saved a coupla lives, I reckon. Anyways, the attackers began scrambling theirselves together somewheres outa sight behind an embankment and after awhile there wasn't any more sounds. So we snuck out from behind our respective trees and saw a bunch of men just crossing over the ridge above our camp, a pinto pony being led away from our anxious gaze.

"There goes a mine," groaned Shady Lane. "A horse full o' gold is leaking right outa our lives."

"Uh-huh," I mourned with him. "I wisht the dang pony hadda told us where at Dad's proputty was and then we'd of had the laugh on them hombres."

"Yeah—we woulda," said Shady, absently putting on his pants.

Well, we decided later in the day, it's tough, but true—we gotta swipe that there pony all over again, making two swipes in all.

Only thing was now they'd prob'ly house him up and make it a slick job to purloin that there talkative mustang.

"Chances are the feller that shot Old Man Gary works on that dang ranch," said Shady. "Our job is not only t' get back the pony, but find the murderer."

"Shore; that's what we set out to do," I said. "Our job is only half done when we find the mine."

So that way we eased off our consciences and made everything honest and above-board.

But we'd have to be slick, we knew that. So we waited a day or two before making the second burglarious attempt on the Packsaddle ranch. We had to get Shady's arm to working again, which wasn't much trouble, and do some high-class planning.

First, though, we moved camp. There was another stream about two miles up a nearby gulch, and we hid out up there so's we wouldn't be so eligible for murder at the hands of them punchers, who might sneak back and pry us loose from our appetites when we wasn't looking.

WELL, sir, we played in luck the third day.

We was riding over the hills looking for a chance to swoop down on that ranch and purloin us a pinto hawse, when we saw the dang pony coming right toward us. Right there in the hills!

The gal on the cayuse rode right up to us and smiled and said: "Hello."

"How'dy," we said. "Nice day, ain't it?"

"Yes, isn't it?" the gal grinned. "Prospectors?"

"Naw," we told her, "hawse lovers. Where at didja get that pony?"

"Cute, isn't he?" she kinda gurgled. Then we began to notice that she was a swell-looking person with a kinda sweet face, like a sunbeam playing in a gladioli bed.

"Yeah; wanta sell him?" Shady asked.

"I should say not," the gal answered. "He's a present to me."

"Oh," said Shady. "Well, yuh never wanta look a gift hawse in the mouth."

The gal giggled. "I didn't," she said. Guess she didn't dare to.

"Does he talk?" I asked her, anxious.

"Who—Walt Slates?" she wondered.

"No, the hawse," Shady said. "Who's Walt Slates?"

"He's the man who gave me this pony," she said. "He's the foreman of the Packsaddle ranch—my dad's."

Shady slipped me a kinda quick glance, and then turned to the gal.

"Wonder where Slates got him," he said, kinda softly.

"He didn't say," the gal answered. "Say—what's the idea of all these questions? Do you think Walt stole this pony?"

"Oh, no—no, 'course not!" Shady spoke up quick. "I'll tell yuh why we been askin' so many questions. Yuh see, we gotta friend that's dying. Dyin' o' the—er—calicoitis. It's a kinda rare disease, an' the only thing that makes him happy is—calico things. Yes, ma'am, it's plumb odd."

"The poor fellow," the gal said. "Is he really dying?"

"He ain't got a chance," answered Shady, winking at me. "So we been goin' places an' findin' calico things to sorta cheer him up—see?"

"Oh, I think that's splendid of you," said the gal.

"Uh-huh," went on Shady. "We done took him a spotted goat an' a chipmunk an' a mottled cow, but we ain't been able to find no pinto pony before—that's why we been askin' yuh such kinda personal questions."

"Oh, I see."

"Yuh, see, all he wants is jus' one look at somethin' calico, an' it makes him happy for maybe a day. Then we have to go get somethin' else. We aim to make his last few days as happy as possible."

His voice kinda broke then, so I brushed away a coupla tears, and hung my haid in a sorrow manner.

The gal looked at us and gulped some, and then said:

"What did you want me to do—lend you my pony?"

"Well, we hate to ask it," said Shady. "We'd be willin' to buy him—or hire him—only maybe yuh wouldn't trust us . . ."

"I'd trust anybody with hearts as big as yours," she said, dabbing at her eyes. "Only—I wouldn't want Walt to know. It might hurt his feelings."

"Shore; we understand that," I chipped in a few cents' worth.

"That was you who tried to steal my pony the other night, I suppose," the gal then said, suddenly.

IT was up to us to say something quick, so I said it.

"Yes, it was. We thought we could just kinda borrow yore pony for a day an' bring him back after our friend had saw him, and nobody woulda been any the wiser and we woulda made him—sniff, sniff—happy."

"Walt heard the commotion," the gal explained, "and as soon as it got daylight, he took some of the boys and trailed you. Three of them were shot, but not fatally."

"Yeah? Too bad," said Shady. "They started shootin' at us an' we didn't know what for."

"Ride back with me to that little coulee this side of the house," she said, then. "I'll walk from there and you can take the pony with you. I'll say nothing, and I doubt if he will be missed till you return him. I am trusting you."

"Yuh'll never regret it," I said to her, kinda fervent. "And you're making more than a dying man happy."

She flashed me a smile that you coulda spread on bread for jam, and I was almost ashamed for a minute. But that's all.

WE promised to bring the pony back within two days, and the gal waved a hand at us as we rode down the gulch toward our camp.

"Now, we gotta make this hawse start to orating right pronto." Shady said. "We gotta get the information outa him an' get him back to that gal which trusted us."

And I looked at him in a kinda knowing manner and the sonofagun blushed.

So we hustled back to camp and picketed the pony again and went about cooking us some goulash and doing some heavy thinking about how you go about learning the equine alphabet.

After supper we went out and asked the hawse some questions, but he was

terrible dumb. He didn't say a dang word, or shake his head, or stamp his feet, or anything educational that way.

It got bedtime, and still the talking hawse had nothing to say. We didn't know but what he had some way of telling us about the mine, not really expecting him to say it in words, but it was too much of a puzzle the way we had to gain knowledge. We didn't know how to go about acquiring it.

So we went to bed to sleep on the matter, and figgered on getting up early and tackling the puzzle again in the morning when our minds was not so heavily impregnated with thoughts of a red-headed gal and such ailments.

And the only reason we didn't start right in issuing sharp-pointed queries to that pony is because when we got up he wasn't among us no more.

NEITHER was my saddle, and a rifle that was on it.

But there was plenty of tracks of a man to tell us where our calico medicine had went. Some lone thief had snuck up and unpicketed him and had took my hull and beat it for parts unknown. Or somewheres.

Which was certainly pickin' on us right. Here we had gone and got hold of that mustang legitimate and all, and lookit now!

Without stopping for breakfast, Shady and I grabbed our mounts and started trailin' the low-down hawse thief into the desert over which he had to travel to get to the road that led outa the hills. We followed him for about ten miles, I reckon, and then we saw him bobbin' along toward Thunder Cloud mountain and getting there plenty.

So we speeded up and circled the hills which he was just entering, because we only had six-guns and he had my rifle. Which is the way you have to treat folks with rifles.

It was mid-afternoon before we got him headed off, and we felt pretty sure he would have to come that way and that he hadn't seen us. And he hadn't. So we dismounted ourselves off'n our hawses and got behind a coupla boulders along the trail and waited for him to step into the middle of disaster. Which he did.

We heard the pony clumpin' along quite awhile before his haid bobbed up over the aidge of the trail, and then we stepped out and covered the thief.

"Lift 'em!" Shady barked, and the feller was so surprised he went for a little trick pistol he was carrying. So I had to shoot it outa his hand, and then he stood hitched.

"What's the idear o' stealin' our hawse?" Shady wanted to know, after we had snagged the cayuse burglar off'n the pony.

"Who wants to know!" he kinda snarled. "G'wan—put me on the spot! Le's get it over."

"Yeah; we got somethin' more entertainin' for you," I said. "You're gonna get a chancet to ride acrost that dang desert bareback like I did."

So we tied him onto the pinto, and I throwed my saddle onto my bronc, and we started the weary way back to camp.

And we'da got there with our human burden with a shot-up wrist, only the sheriff and a posse came along and said they'd take him back to Los Bolo for us. Seemed the tough hombre had held up the bank and shot the cashier and got away with fifteen thousand dollars.

Sheriff Caywood had tracked him into the hills to where his flivver had got itself full of cactus punctures, then the tough city crook had started out afoot. He found our camp and swiped the only hawse that was picketed, and that was the story.

"There's a coupla thousand reward for this lad," Caywood hollered, as he rode away. "Come in when yuh're in town an' get th' dinero."

Which didn't hurt our feelings none to speak of at all.

WELL, sir, by the time we got ourselfs recuperated up after that long hard ride, without no breakfast or

other fuel, why, we was still unfit to delve into the problem of makin' a hawse give up any mining secrets, and we had to hit the hay again without no more knowledge than we had before we found the dang spotted cayuse.

But we started bravely forth next morning to garner some information outa that bronc which hadn't indulged in no edifying conversation up to that moment of time.

We asked questions, and made signs and looked him all over for any kinda marks, and opened his mouth and looked at his teeth, even if he was a gift hawse, and still we wasn't any further outa the depths of ignorance than we was before we started.

It certainly was a discouraging situation, till Shady Lane thought of something of moment.

"Chances are," he said, "what Dad Gary meant was that this here spotted animile would lead us to the mine without doin' no conversational feat. Let's put a string on him an' see will he act sensible an' not run back to that red-haided angel—gal—an' maybe lead us to the mine."

So we saddled up and started forth forthwith. Only the dang mustang wouldn't play. He kept hangin' back and Shady said maybe the mine was in that direction. So we turned around and started to go the other way, and the doggoned pony hung back some more.

It was most discouraging.

No, sir, it didn't make no never-minds which way we wanted to go, this here steed felt the urge not to do it. The dang hawse didn't make sense at all, and if it wasn't for the fact that he carried the brand D-B, which Shady knowed was the brand on Dad Gary's pony, we woulda figgered we had the wrong animile.

But we wasn't getting nowhere at a very rapid rate indeed, and it wasn't goin' to be long now till that Jane gal was goin' to run outa patience and trust and loving kindness, and would tell them tough, rough cowhands about us borrowing her pet pony—and what would the pore robin do then, pore thing!

"Maybe we better turn him loose an' foller him," Shady suggested then. "I'll bet he'll go straight to his ol' camp ground."

WHICH seemed to me to have a flavor of sense to it, and I seconded the motion by voting aye. But we didn't turn the tongue-tied cayuse loose till we had took him over the hills a long ways from that red-haided siren which lures hawses and men alike, for fear the dang little fool would wanta go back to her. Then we took off the rope.

And that didn't make sense, either. The pony tried to run around us and beat it back to the Packsaddle ranch, but we haided him off till we got good and tired of it. And after he saw he wasn't making no progress in that direction, why, he stopped and started to ketch up on his feeding.

"Orneriest dang pony I ever wished I never had saw," complained Shady. "If'n I was a talkin' hawse, by gosh I'd talk an' be a man, 'stead of seein' how dang onreasonable I could be. He makes me sick."

And, being sick thataway, why, Shady hauled off and rode up to that ornery pony and whanged him over the rump with his rope. The cayuse seemed kinda surprised and maybe chagrined and a bit hurt. You could tell that from the sad way he looked at Shady.

Then he tossed his haid in quite a resigned way, and seemed to say:

"Oh, well, if you insist—come on!"

Then he started galloping off over the hills in the direction of Thunder Cloud mountain where we figgered maybe the mine might be located, though it was only a kinda guess.

Yes, ma'am, that danged pony seemed to have got some sense at last, and Shady and I, we felt first rate and full of good cheer and what-not at the way things was about to turn out.

"Some folks are like that hawse,"

Shady opined as we loped along after the pinto. "Treat 'em right, an' they give yuh the hawse laugh. Beat 'em, an' they amount to somethin'. We're on the right track at last. The ol' man figgered the pony would take us right smack up to the mine, and I reckon he woulda if'n he hadn't fell for that red-haided gal."

Straight as he could travel, that dang pony kept streaking out acrost them gold-studded hills, getting nearer and nearer to riches as he went, we knowed, and it was shore a fine feeling to have—feeling that every step you took was leading you nearer and nearer to wealth.

And it seemed that the closter he got to the mine the faster he traveled, that hawse. He was now hitting on all cylinders and the going wasn't any too good, either. Fact was, Shady and I had kinda slowed up because we was riding along a narrow trail which was just sorta hanging onto the aidge of a cliff above a gorge that must a been about six hundred feet down. Straight down, I mean.

But we had to keep the pony in sight, so we risked a coupla good lives to do that same. But we was so pleased with the way the dang pinto was acting, leading us straight into the lap of luxury, that we was kinda reckless.

And then, just as we had a fortune practically in our grasp, why, the pinto stumbled over somethin', tried to keep from falling, slipped again and went hurtling over the gorge!

Old Man Hard Luck on the job again!

We rode up to the place where he had gone over and looked down. There he was, one laig bent under him, half way down, caught and held by a big rock.

"Laig busted, I reckon," said Shady. "We better go down somehow, an' shoot him."

Yes, ma'am, there was our only chance to find the lost mine and we had to kill it.

So I clumb down that there dangerous cliff, which wasn't exactly a cliff now, but a pretty dang steep slope, and got closter enough to the pinto to see that two laigs was broke. Then I shot the pore little rascal which had given his life trying to show us where at was Dad's lost mine.

I then aidged a bit closter, because I saw what had caused the pony to stumble over the cliff—his left shoe had become loose and had caught on a sharp rock, throwing him. And as I took hold of the shoe to examine it closter, I nearly fell over the aidge of the cliff my own self—because there was a paper sticking out from under the shoe, which was solid in the center to keep the pony from picking up rocks.

I got out my knife and pried off the shoe and got the paper out. Well, sir, it was a map. And it showed the way to Dad Gary's lost mine. And the mine wasn't in that direction at all, but back the other way, not over five miles from our camp. That dang pony remained a cockeyed liar to the last.

SO after we had gone and found the mine, why, Shady Lane and I, we rode over to the Packsaddle ranch and made medicine with Mr. Walter Slates, giver-away of hawses.

He was standing at the corral when we rode up, but didn't recognize us as the hawse thieves he had shot at.

"Lookin' for jobs?" he wanted to know.

"We're lookin' for the gent which shot pore ol' Dad Gary in the back," Shady said. "This here murderer also took the old man's wallet an' outfit, includin' a pinto pony. Know anythin' about it?"

I kept my hand closter to my shooting tool, and Shady done the same. He was kinda wrathy, Shady was. Slates eyed him for a minute, face reddening, then he said:

"Mebbe I do know somethin' about—the—murder. I—do yuh think I done it?"

"I wouldn't be at all astonished," said Shady. Did yuh?"

"I did not—but I think I know who did," said Slates. "Leastways, I know who brung a pinto pony here an' left it

with me as security for a loan of twenty bucks."

"Where at is this hombre?" asked Shady.

"I dunno, but we'll find him," said Slates. "Hey," he called to a puncher. "Saddle my Long John hawse an' bring him here."

Seemed he didn't want us to think he was going to try to high-tail it outa there.

He led the way and we rode for an hour or two, till we come to a line camp up in the mountains. There was a feller puttering around the cabin, and we rode right up to him.

Slates was in the lead and he snapped out some sharp-pointed words to the hombre.

"Elevate yore paws, feller!"

And the feller elevated 'em.

Shady got off and took Dad Gary's six-shooter off'n him, an' tied his lass rope around his hands and neck, and we led the pilgrim forth.

Shore, he was the murderer. A kinda half-witted prospector, he was, which didn't have sense enough to leave Dad's pinto pony alone after he had shot the old man.

He confessed right off. And he was so simple-minded about it that Sheriff Caywood got him sloughed into a home for the feeble-witted. Which is a swell place for a lot of folks I know, but am not naming no names.

It is safer that way.

And Jane Sayre cried when we told her about her pony lying hisself to death, but Slates said he'd go somewheres and get her another calico hawse just as good, and she brightened up and the birds began for to warble and the sun began to tickle the world, and everything was all right.

'Cause hadn't Shady Lane and I found us a mine fulla prosperity and luxury? And all we had to do now was to chase a camel through the eye of a needle, and then we could die in peace.

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BATTLE WITH A COUGAR

THE story of a desperate hand-to-claw struggle with a cougar in the middle of Kimo Lake near Nanaimo in British Columbia, was recounted by William Hancock and his son Alf.

They were trolling, and noticed the animal swimming across the lake a few hundred yards distant. When they approached, the cougar swerved toward them with a snarl. Hancock struck with one oar, sending him under water and at the same time breaking the oar in half.

With one oar left and the cougar renewing the attack, the occupants of the boat were pressed to keep it from upsetting their frail craft. After thirty-five minutes of battling, the animal showed signs of weakening, and Hancock was able to grab its tail and haul it partly into the boat where he finished the struggle by clubbing the big cat's head until its fighting heart died.

SKY PILOT

By DABNEY OTIS COLLINS

Author of "The White Stallion," "The Trail of Pinon Pete," etc.

COLORADO MOUNTAINS—"You can't never tell what's on the cards by lookin' on the backs, can you?" the gambler asked the sky pilot. And the parson shook with him—for each had misread the other.

"GIT offa my claim, Sky pilot!" Alaska Joe, red-faced, red-bearded, big of bone like an ox, swung the poll of his miner's pick hard against the stake freshly driven into the rocky bench of Wildcat Gulch. The stake snapped in two, even with the ground. Threateningly he wheeled upon the tall, well-knit, sober faced young man whose claim marker he had destroyed.

"Vamoose!" Alaska Joe snarled from the corner of his twisted mouth. "Sky pilots ain't got no business gold rushin'—that's work fer men. Go'n back to mem'rizin' yer Sunday School pomes an' leave minin' to miners—afore somebody slaps yer face."

Adam Baker's professionally mild manner fell from him like a cast-off garment. His smoky-blue eyes flashed fire, he grew white about the lips. "This is my claim, and I'm staying," he said quietly. "If you think you can bluff me off, you're mistaken. I was a man before I became a minister."

Alaska Joe shot a swift, cunning glance up and down Wildcat Gulch. The ragged gash, down which a small crystal stream wound between high, yellow-belted walls, was alive with booted, bearded, flannel shirted men. Hurriedly they were running back and forth, stepping off distances, driving in hastily inscribed stakes. Each man was feverishly intent on his own urgent business of locating a claim which showed a trace of color, or gave evidence of gold-bearing ore. No one was noticing Alaska Joe.

"So you was a man, huh—afore you was a sky pilot." The big red-faced miner let the words roll off his loose lips insultingly, one by one.

Adam Baker's face paled with anger. "I don't wear a gun," he said. "But if it is a fight you want, you can have it."

A sneering laugh burst from Alaska

Joe's thick lips. "Wanna fight, huh? Bare fist an' skull! Who ever heard tell of a preacher tryin' to fight a man!"

With a jerk his gun belt came off. Pretending to drop the belt to the ground, he swung it suddenly from him, holstered Colt endmost. With a dull, soggy thwack, the heavy gun caught Baker against the temple. His arms shot up, and he sank heavily to his knees.

Alaska Joe let the gun belt fall from his hairy, big-knuckled fingers. He cast stealthy glances toward the milling gold seekers. He was still unobserved. "Tryin' to jump my claim, huh!" he bellowed loudly. "Git up offa yer knees an' fight like a man. Too late to be prayin' now!"

Even as Adam struggled groggily up, the miner's mallet-like fist crashed against his unprotected forehead. The terrific force of the dynamite-packed blow half blinded Adam, yet he found his feet in time to ward off a portion of the next pile-driver.

Like flying pistons Adam's fists shot from his body. At the first crack of knuckles against flesh a hot, savage thrill rippled through his veins, a gush of manpower steeled his muscles. It was a long time since Adam Baker had gotten into a fight, but he had not forgotten how to use his fists.

Before the sky pilot's fierce onslaught Alaska Joe fell back, as much from astonishment, probably, as from caution. He steadied himself, then let loose a wide-swinging haymaker at Adam's head. Panther-quick, Adam ducked, and the neck-breaking blow merely clipped the side of his head.

Fighting with cold, machine-like fury, Adam bored in with a stiff right jolt to the claim jumper's bearded chin, followed with a lightning, teeth-jarring uppercut to the jaw. Alaska Joe rocked in his boots, drew back, out of reach. "Stand up and fight!" barked Adam, eyes aflame with the light of righteous battle.

"Blast yer soul!" Alaska Joe spat through bleeding lips. Spread-armed, his bulky body catapulted through the air. With all his might, Adam sank both fists into the writhing, twisted face, but he could not stop, nor even halt, that human cannon ball. Backward he hurtled, with the miner's iron-muscled arms fastened around his waist. He slapped the ground with his back. Breath whistled through his clinched teeth.

"I got you—now!" Alaska Joe panted. "Give up?"

ADAM'S only answer was the quick thrust of his hands toward the bullet head which bored into his chest. Swiftly he locked his wrists about the thick, bull neck, concentrated all his strength in one mighty twist—as Alaska Joe's blunt fingers buried themselves in his throat.

No sound there on the rocky bench now, save the scrape of boot leather against granite, and the gasping, sobbing breathing of the fighters. The punishment both men were taking was terrible. Adam, purple-faced, all but strangled, was straining every muscle in his body to twist the sourdough's head backward on its corded neck. It was the deadly headlock.

Already Alaska Joe's eyes were bursting from their sockets, the congested veins in his neck standing out like slate-colored ropes. Another wrench Adam gave the big, perspiring head. A low moan rattled from the miner's constricted throat, his clutch on Adam's throat weakened.

"Turn loose!" gasped Adam. "Turn loose—or I'll break—your neck!"

Alaska Joe released his hold. A full minute the two men lay inert, too exhausted to move. Then they staggered up, chests heaving, rubbing bleeding knuckles against ripped shirt fronts.

"Get off my claim," Adam ordered quietly.

Alaska Joe said nothing. A long slow look, filled with bitter hatred, he bent into the face of the man who had beaten him. Then he went slowly toward his gun belt lying some thirty feet distant. Adam turned away.

He was stooping to pick up the broken claim stake when the whine of a bullet past his ear momentarily paralyzed him. So close was the bullet that it scorched his cheek. Two shots crashed out behind him. They sounded almost as one.

Adam spun around, shaking and quivering from having been so near the Great Divide. He saw Alaska Joe, doubled up, clutching at his empty gun hand, cursing horribly. And striding up the slope, came the tall, broad-shouldered, black clothed figure of the gambler, Tascosa, in his hand a smoking six-shooter. Behind him ran a dozen miners, aroused by the shot.

"I call yore bet," Tascosa said to the raving Alaska Joe.

The claim jumper chose to ignore the gambler's challenge. He picked up the gun which had been shot from his hand. "I ain't through wit' you," he snarled at Adam. "This here's my claim, an' I'm gonna have it, see?" Still muttering, he slunk into a clump of spruce trees and out of sight.

"DIDN'T wing you, did he, parson?" Tascosa inquired.

Adam shook his head gravely. "Tascosa, you saved my life. I'm much obliged to you."

"He was stackin' the cards on you," the gambler said simply. Keenly he observed Adam's torn clothing and white-splotched throat.

Adam, interpreting Tascosa's look, laughed shortly. "That fellow tried to bluff me off my claim, and I had to fight him," he explained. "Bad example for a minister to set, but. . . ."

"You done well, parson. Only, you orter finished the job. That Alaska Joe's a bad card fer any man to have out ag'in him."

"That's shore right," echoed the miners. "Gettin' down to bedrock, that hunk o' low grade orter be run outa camp."

A thoughtful expression came into the gambler's black eyes as he studied the ruins of the cabin which had once stood on the claim. Only the rough stone chimney remained now, arising out of the ashes around it, as if it might be a monument raised over the lonely grave of some prospector's blasted hopes. Also he noticed the old yellow mounds of earth thrown up for a hundred feet, or so, on all sides of the chimney.

"I wonder why he was so set on this here pertickler claim," Tascosa said. "There's plenty others in the deck, jest as likely looking."

"I don't know," Adam answered. "But he'll never have this claim."

"He will, if he files on it before you do," Tascosa pointed out. "An' if I read the cards right, that jasper's on his way to Rattlesnake Butte right now, to do that little thing."

The sky pilot's eyes blazed with anger. "I thought I was done fighting," he said. "But if Satan sets obstacles in my path I shall not go around them."

"All the same, parson, yore hand would 'pear stronger if you held an ace." Significantly the gambler tapped his black gun butt.

" 'Thou shalt not kill'," Adam quoted earnestly. "In time of need, strength will come to me."

The parson smiled grimly.

"You're liable to need it. That Alaska Joe is a bad hombre. He's killed three men. Used to prospect up in these here diggin's before the Klondike fever got him. I was jest thinking, a while back—mebbe he knows somethin' about the man that built the cabin that used to stand there. Anyways, parson, it'd be good poker fer you to stake out another claim."

"Much obliged for the advice, Tascosa," Adam smiled. "But I'm staying. It might seem out of place for a man of my calling to be gold hunting like this, but, to tell you the truth, I need gold, and need it badly. You see, I've got a sick wife back in Ohio." Adam touched his chest. "I've got to raise enough money to get her out West—before it's too late."

CAREFULLY he paced off the boundaries of his claim, marked his name on each corner stake, and posted a notice on the stone chimney. Then he got his horse and set out for the county seat at Rattlesnake Butte—thirty miles away as the crow flies, five times that by horseback.

Adam gigged his roan pony hard all the remainder of that day, and toward sunset, having come upon an open glade near a stream in the forest, he threw off to make camp. He hobbled his horse, and after a hearty meal of beans, sowbelly, bannock bread and jam, rolled himself in his blankets and went to sleep.

Scarcely had he closed his eyes, or so it seemed to the tired sky pilot, when he was snapped out of sound slumber by the crack of a twig nearby. Sharply he sat up, every nerve a-tingle. He stabbed keen glances into the velvety darkness. He heard no other noise so he lay back on the saddle with a contented sigh.

"Must've been my horse, or the wind," he mumbled sleepily.

"Yeah. Musta been," came a harsh voice out of the blackness, as a heavy boot crashed through the carpet of pine needles. "An' don't you wiggle, neither, or I'll slam a bullet in yer hide."

Alaska Joe! Adam's marrow froze. His hair stood on end. A cord seemed to be drawn about his throat, shutting off his breath. Scarcely knowing what he did, he flung the blankets from him with one sweep of his arm, leaped to his feet.

"What's this!" he demanded angrily, "waking me up this time of night!"

Alaska Joe laughed coarsely as he came closer. He thrust the barrel of his gun against Adam's chest. "Ain't gittin' mad, be you, gospel-spreader?"

"I'm not afraid of you," Adam told him. "What do you want?"

"Well, seein' as you're all het up, mebbe this here'll cool you off some." The sourdough's great hand swung out and forward in a lightning arc. Its open palm caught Adam full on the cheek, with a sound like the crack of a rifle. The terrific driving force behind the cowardly blow spun his head around, the stinging pain of it blinded him.

"Har, har! Now, turn yer other cheek—preacher!"

Adam did. But it was only to follow through the savage right he ripped into Alaska Joe's leering face. Followed the next second by a left hook which sank wrist-deep in the miner's broad stomach. Gone from Adam was every shred of religious teaching which had been drilled into him since childhood. He was conscious only of this beast who threatened his life.

FIERCELY he struck the gun barrel aside, seized Alaska Joe around the waist in a blind grapple. A breathless moment they threshed violently in the undergrowth, striking, clutching, jabbing. Then Adam felt a deadening blow behind his ear, as if the whole left side of his head had caved in on his brain. He fell forward, sprawling in the brush—almost out.

"Fool!" snarled Alaska Joe, holstering his gun. "I woulda drilled you if we hadn't been right beside the trail."

He reached down and jerked the unconscious sky pilot to a sitting position against a tree, forced the neck of a whisky bottle between the set teeth. "Drink!" he gritted. "I ain't got all night here."

Adam gulped down a swallow of the powerful liquor, his eyes opened. Alaska Joe pulled him to his feet, planted the gun muzzle between his shoulders, faced him around.

"Git going!" he rasped. He jabbed the Colt barrel into Adam's back.

"Where're—you taking me?" Adam asked dazedly.

"To hell. There's a nice high cliff over here aways, an' yer hoss is 'bout to th'ow you over it."

Adam felt a tightening of the skin over his cheek bones. Icy sweat beaded his forehead and the backs of his hands.

Alaska Joe was going to push him over a cliff, so that his death would appear accidental. People might suspect—Tascosa, for instance—but no one would be able to prove the miner's guilt.

Black as the enveloping night were Adam's thoughts as he stumbled through the pine forest, guided by the pressure of the gun barrel against his spine. Desperately he drove his throbbing brain to find some loophole in the wall of death so swiftly closing in on him. Feverishly he sought even a slender thread on which to fasten a forlorn hope. There was nothing. As Tascosa would have expressed it, it was Alaska Joe's trick.

"Here's yer grave," announced Alaska Joe.

ADAM sucked in a great breath. The earth seemed to have opened before him. He could feel, as well as see, the dizzy drop into night-filled space. A strange, fierce love of life gripped Adam. Not fear of death, but love of life. Every fiber of his strong young body sickened at the thought of that swift, bone-smashing whirl into the midnight pit.

"They tells me," Alaska Joe was sneering, "that you kin say any verse in the Scriptur's backwards and for'ards and in the middle. Whiles I'm countin' 'three' you kin say all you got a notion to. One. . . ."

Adam froze. "Why do you want my blood on your hands, man!" he almost screamed. "What have I . . ."

"Two. . . .

As if released by some powerful spring, Adam's right foot kicked backward and upward. The heel of his boot struck Alaska Joe's wrist a sharp rap. Over Adam's head catapulted the six-gun into the chasm. Quickly he pivoted on the astonished sourdough, crouching, fists swinging.

"My faith is my strength!" he shouted. "I'll kill you with my bare hands! I'll throw you over the cliff!"

With a wild burst of speed he sprang after his enemy. But Alaska Joe avoided his rush, ran headlong into the forest.

"Come on, fight, you coward!" yelled the fighting parson.

But Alaska Joe apparently did not wish a fight. "I'll git you yet, blast you—an' my claim, too!" he shouted from the darkness. Adam heard his heavy boots crashing through the undergrowth.

In the fullness of his victory, Adam smiled. But as he trudged wearily toward his pony, the thought was borne in upon him that he was not finished with Alaska Joe. Next time they met, very likely, would come the showdown. Adam winced inwardly. He had no desire to harm any man. Then he thought of his wife, Mary, with her white face and wasted body, and his jaw set.

"As they say out here in the gold country," he muttered. "I'm playing out my string."

WHEN, two weeks later, Adam arrived in Wildcat Gulch, the miners were breaking camp. Tent stakes were being pulled up, burros and pack horses loaded. No gold had been found, nor a trace of the precious ore. The egg-sized nugget which had started the rush seemed to be all the gold there was in Wildcat Gulch.

A spitting of snow had begun to fall. Dense, horizontal banks of leaden clouds hanging low in the northwest told of more snow to come. No man cared to run the risk of being snowbound in this isolated wilderness of upflung rock and spreading forest. By nightfall three-fourths of the disappointed prospectors were on their way back to Rattlesnake Butte.

Adam cast an anxious eye up at the drab sky. "I'll stay two or three days," he decided. "I can't help thinking Alaska Joe must know there's gold on this claim."

But when Adam threw off his blankets in the chill gray dawn and began preparing breakfast, he discovered his grub had been stolen during the night. His horse, also, was gone.

The remainder of the miners offered no assistance as they rode past him and out of the gulch. According to their stern code, every man's business was his own. Besides, in this man-country a sky pilot was considered about as unnecessary as a boiled shirt. Both were useful only at weddings, and funerals.

Only Tascosa, the gambler, expressed sympathy. "I reckon you got a purty good idee what gent cold-decked you."

Adam nodded grimly.

Tascosa pulled thoughtfully at his drooping black mustache. "There might be more on the cards than what 'pears to be," he said slowly. "This here Alaska Joe now, he ain't considered 'zactly a right bower by them what's knowed him. Stampeded from over Los Lunas way when he caught wind of the strike."

"I'm more determined to stay than ever, now," Adam declared.

"Without no grub?"

"The Lord will provide."

"Mebbeso," Tascosa said vaguely. "See here, parson, I don't pertickler admire the deal these here two-bit miners give you, leavin' you without no stakes. You an' me don't deal 'em from the same side of the table, but what say if I take chips in yore game? I got plenty grub and a extry bronc."

Adam grasped the gambler's hand. "It's a go, Tascosa," he said with a warm smile. "We'll divide evenly on whatever we find."

THE strange pardners were busily digging on the old cabin site when a grizzled, leathery faced old man, with a bundle of traps slung to his sturdy shoulders, climbed down the side of the gulch and came up to them.

"Whar's the balance o' the gold hunters at?" the trapper inquired, with a twinkle behind the water curtain of his faded blue eyes.

"Gone home," Adam answered. "No gold."

The old man unslung his traps and sat down on a boulder. "No gold, eh?" he said, and there was a note of challenge in his voice. "Wal, I'll lay my next winter's ketch ag'in a dollar Mex, thar's gold in Wildcat Gulch—plenty gold."

Adam and Tascosa exchanged swift glances. "How do you figger her, pardner?" the gambler asked.

The trapper gnawed off a man-sized chew of tobacco, then inclined his head toward the stone chimney. "See that thar ol' chimbley? I knowed the man that built her an' the cabin what oncet stood whar you men's a-diggin'. Jonas, was the only handle I ever heard tell he had. Sorta loony cuss, what was always readin' Scriptur', as he called it. I useter bed down with him ever' time I come up this way. Ten year ago, that was."

The old man chewed in silence a minute. "Jonas dug gold outa this here gulch. Folks never figgered he found nothin', but I know. I seen some o' the yaller pizen with my own eyes. An' he never spent none of it. He was what folks calls a hermit, an' never left his diggin's 'cept to git a leetle grub down to Rattlesnake, ever' once in a spell."

"What ever became of him?" Adam was curious to know. The story interested him.

The trapper slowly shook his head. "Ain't nobody ever found out what become o' Jonas. It was more'n a year afore anybody missed him. Men figgered somebody murdered him, thinkin' he had a gold cache. I know he'd of died afore he would of told."

"Mebbe the dry-gulcher made off with the cache," Tascosa said. "Somebody's been doin' a lotta gopherin' around here."

"Most folks figgered that the man what done the diggin' pecosed Jonas. But he didn't locate the cache, you kin bet on that. Jonas was cunnin' as a lobo wolf. That gold is still in Wildcat Gulch, or I'm a dry land beaver."

The sky pilot and the gambler watched the broad back of the old trapper disappear with its burden around a knife-edged shoulder of the gulch. "Scratchin' fer gold ain't my game," Tascosa said. "But we might be holdin' more trump

cards than we figgered on. As the Mex says. *Quien sabe?"*

"Alaska Joe—" began Adam, but a howling blast of wind and blinding snow rushing down the gulch, swept his breath away. That screaming squall might well have been the ghost of old Jonas, howling in derision at the men who were so foolhardy as to dare seek his hidden treasure.

"We gotta be gettin' outa here!" Tascosa shouted from the crook of the arm flung across his face. "If we get snowed in, the game's up!"

BY morning Wildcat Gulch was buried beneath a blanket of glittering white. A foot deep the snow lay, except where the wind had blown it into drifts, some of which were as deep as a man is tall. From the dull, overcast sky feathery flakes still sifted down silently, steadily.

Tascosa shook his head. "Better call fer a new deal an' pull stakes fer Rattlesnake," he advised. "When the canyons 'tween here an' Rattlesnake drifts half full of snow, we'll be euchered plumb handsome."

Adam cast a speculative glance over the winding sheet which enshrouded the gulch and the crags beyond. Then his gaze returned to the stone chimney.

"I suppose you're right, Tascosa. We can't do any digging anyhow. But that old chimney's got me guessing. See how big it is—a whole lot too big for a one-room cabin."

"Figger they's a joker in that chimbley, do you, parson? Well, it ain't too big—not fer a country that gets forty below."

Adam laughed. "Anyhow, I won't be satisfied until I examine that chimney. Come on, Tascosa."

SYSTEMATICALLY they began tapping the stones in the chimney with the heads of their picks. But no hollow stone did they find.

Tascosa dropped his pick in the snow. "Reckon old Jonas figgered there'd be peckerwoods hammerin' on his chimbley. That trapper hombre. . . ."

He was interrupted by an excited, high-pitched yell from Adam, crouched within the great fireplace. "Tascosa! I've found something! A stone with writing cut in it!"

"What does she say?"

"Can't make it out yet. It's all covered with soot. Wait a minute— Strike a match, Tascosa—hold it closer. Now—what does that say—'Mat 77—Ex 715—Cron 171— Is 576—' What do you make out of that?"

"I checks the bet," the gambler answered promptly.

Adam crawled out of the fire place. He gave every evidence of being lost in deep thought. His brows were tangled, his lips moved silently, his eyes were filled with a faraway look. Suddenly his whole frame leaped with a vibrant rush of blood. His face shone with unutterable joy.

"I've got it! I've got it!" he yelled. "Mat 77 is Matthew, seventh chapter, seventh verse—'Seek and ye shall find'!"

Tascosa, for once, lost his poker face. "Hooraw!" he cried. "Read them other cards, parson!"

"Ex 715 is Exodus, seventh chapter, fifteenth verse—'And thou shalt stand by the river's brink.' Chronicles, seventeenth chapter, first verse—'Lo, I dwell in an house of cedars'—"

"It's that patch of cedars right over there on the edge of the stream!" interrupted Tascosa excitedly. "What—"

"Isaiah, fifth chapter, seventy-sixth verse," continued Adam. His face became a blank. "There isn't any such verse," he muttered.

"Shuffle 'em again."

Then Adam's face broke into a smile. "I've got it. It's Isaiah, fifty-seventh chapter, sixth verse!"

"'Among the smooth stones is thy portion.' Come on, Tascosa!"

BOTH men snatched up their shovels, ran swiftly toward the cedar thicket. Only a thin layer of snow covered

the ground beneath the thickly foliaged trees. For an hour, two hours they dug. Almost the entire floor of the thicket had been uncovered to the depth of a foot. Not much was left.

Tascosa mopped his perspiring forehead with a black silk handkerchief. "Sorta 'pears like old Jonas is playing 'em jacks wild, don't it, parson?"

Adam, at that moment, dropped to his knees, and dug his fingers feverishly into the soil he had loosened with his shovel. "Come here, Tascosa!" he called excitedly. "A circle of stones—smooth stones! 'Among the smooth stones is thy portion'! Dig, Tascosa, dig!"

Dirt never flew faster. Two feet down, Adam's shovel struck a soft object. "Look, Tascosa! Isn't that a sack?"

Tascosa peered keenly into the hole, reached in an arm. "It's a sack, parson! A buckskin sack! Here, grab hold!"

It took the combined strength of both men to pull the sodden buckskin sack from the hole and to drag it out of the thicket into an open space. Its sides were jagged, as from sharp-edged rocks.

"There's the deal, parson. She's on yore claim, too."

Adam's hands trembled as he opened his knife. "Half's yours, Tascosa."

He cut the thongs which bound the mouth of the sack, and inside they saw a dull yellowish-brown mass of nuggets, ranging in size from the end of a man's little finger to large marbles. Both men stood speechless, staring with bulging eyes.

"Placer nuggets!" the gambler whispered. "Must be more'n a hundred pounds of nuggets — twenty-five thousand . . ."

"Th'ow up yer hands!"

AT that harsh, cutting command from behind them, both men froze in their crouching positions. Adam did not need to look up. He knew who had stolen upon them in the soundless snow.

"Mean it!" rasped Alaska Joe. "Up with 'em or I'm sinkin' a shaft in yer brains."

"Yore trick," the gambler murmured, and his hands moved slowly upward.

Adam looked levelly at Alaska Joe as the miner jerked Tascosa's six-shooter from his belt and filled his left hand. "Now I know who murdered Jonas," he said.

Some of the red left Alaska Joe's face. "You're smart, ain't yer—fer a preacher? Well, what you know won't never hurt nobody."

Adam paled as he caught the sinister meaning which lay behind that threat. He knew Alaska Joe meant to kill him.

The claim jumper turned to Tascosa. "Feller, I see you got a hoss staked to that pine tree over there. Bring him here an' help me pack this sack on him. None o' yer card sharp's tricks neither, or I'll plug you quick as I would ary other coyote."

Tascosa started toward his horse. "Right long walk back to Rattlesnake Butte," he said.

The corner of Alaska Joe's thick-lipped mouth lifted in a savage leer, like the noiseless snarl of a vicious dog. "You needn't be worrying 'bout walkin', tinhorn. You'll have a pair o' wings, *poco tiempo,* so you kin fly back."

Angrily he turned on Adam, yet keeping one gun trained on the gambler's back. "So you're the sky pilot what kin fight, huh? Jest see how fast you kin tie that sack back up. Then, I'm givin' you a chance to fight hot lead."

Black despair seized on Adam. His heart clogged his throat. It was plain that Alaska Joe would kill him as soon as he had tied up the sack. He had less than a minute to live. . . .

AS Adam's sweaty fingers caught hold of the buckskin thong, a wild, desperate plan flashed like a rocket across his boiling brain. One chance in a hundred—but he would be shot down in his tracks as soon as he straightened up. Into the sack he furtively thrust one hand. Frantically his fingers sought among the placer nuggets, closed over a nugget the size of a grouse's egg. . . .

"*Muy pronto*, you!" growled Alaska Joe. "I ain't lettin' you pray, this time."

Adam came up, swiftly as a released bow string. He whirled half around as he arose, right hand darting forward. Straight into Alaska Joe's forehead sped the heavy nugget. In the same split-second the miner fired. The powder flash burned Adam's face. But Alaska Joe was staggering backward when he pulled trigger, and the slug merely creased Adam's skull.

Before Alaska Joe could throw his Colt back into position, Adam struck him full in the chest with the entire weight of his madly flung body—with such terrific force that the miner's left gun was knocked from his hand. In a tangled heap of arms and legs they went down in the snow, both men struggling for possession of the gun. Now Adam had the miner's gun wrist locked in his iron grip. Backward, against Alaska Joe's side, he fiercely strove to press the barrel.

A writhing, wrestling struggle—quick, terrible. Then the gun spurted red and boomed with muffled report. A cry of agony burst from Alaska Joe's lips. He fell away from Adam, all strength suddenly departed from his mighty muscles. Adam recoiled in speechless awe. His wide-eyed gaze was fixed on the dark crimson spot which stained the miner's shirt bosom. In creeping horror he watched Alaska Joe's eyes.

"I—I've killed a man!" Adam whispered through lips cold and gray. He did not feel the weight of Tascosa's hand on his shoulder.

"Not a man, parson," the gambler corrected softly. "You ain't killed no man. You jest killed a snake, to keep him from killin' you—an' yore wife."

Adam turned his white, drawn face upon Tascosa. He thrust out an icy hand. "You're a man, Tascosa," he said earnestly. "As good a man as I've ever known."

The gambler favored Adam with one of his rare smiles. "Much obliged, parson. You're a man, yoreself—a better man than ever I figgered a sky pilot could be. You can't never tell what's on the cards by lookin' at the backs, can you?"

FLYING AGAINST DEATH

UP in that storm-driven region south of Lake Athabaska, an Indian's axe slipped as he was chopping his winter's supply of fire-wood. His tribesmen performed crude surgery to save his nearly severed leg, ripped a string of moose hide babiche from a snowshoe to make a rude tourniquet, dispatched a runner of the tribe to the R. C. M. P. post at Fort Chipewyan. For all their frantic effort, the wounded man's very life flowed out and away in his blood.

Then, like a miracle, a "red thunder bird," Commercial Airways Bellanca of the Royal Mail, swooped down from the sky. It skidded to a stop on the treacherous ice of the lake. Out jumped the runner who'd stumbled into the post just as the plane streaked down to land with the mail. After him came Constable Johnson of the Mounted, with Pilot C. G. Lumsden close behind. Rapidly they bundled the wounded redman into the plane, swung off in the teeth of a gathering gale to rush to the hospital far north in Fort Smith.

Back at Jackfish Lake, to the south of Athabaska, the weird death-chant of the Chipewyans died out. The Great Father had been good to his red-skinned children once more. Their tribal brother would live.

A GAMBLE IN GUNS

By TOM J. HOPKINS

Author of "Battle Brand," etc.

HORSE RANGE—The Slicker Kid was cornered—holed up in a dead-end canyon. Yet the Kid was ready to stand up and gamble, for he hid two six-gun aces up his sleeve.

THE Slicker Kid rode low in his saddle, a canvas sack wedged between his slim hips and the cantle. From time to time, in the mad race that had been going on for almost an hour now, he had turned to empty his rifle at the posse. Now he was wasting no time on shooting. Never a glance from his sharp black eyes, glinting brightly through his mask, was turned on the fifteen pursuers. A chance shot at any moment might cut him down. Only the impossibility of accurate shooting from the backs of plunging horses had saved his life so far.

Two thin lines of excited horsemen raced along adjacent ridge crests. Carl Tonkins, leading his posse, his star glistening in the last rays of the setting sun, rode with loose reins. His stubby carbine beat a deadly tattoo. His eyes flashed eagerly. For the first time in the two years that the dreaded Slicker Kid had been operating in the vicinity the killer was under the guns of the law.

From the two ridges rifles banged a steady accompaniment to the thudding hoofs. Lead whistled and whined a song of death for the lone rider racing in the canyon bottom between the lines of the posse.

But he rode on unhurt, direct for a tall cliff a few hundred yards ahead. There the ridges closed in on a great escarpment which led to the higher ranges. There the posse was sure that he would be cornered, caught between their guns, to die or give himself up. Yet the Slicker Kid rode on with a new light of hope in his black eyes. Long before he had planned on this very thing.

Carl Tonkins, acting-sheriff of the county, since his chief had been murdered by the man he was now pursuing,

yelled excitedly as he saw the rider definitely pocketed. A quick jerk brought his horse to a sliding stop. His carbine, at his shoulder, roared twice. The outlaw swayed. His horse plunged down —dead.

The Slicker Kid hit rolling, with the canvas sack clutched under his arm. His rifle swinging from the other hand, he came to his feet and sprinted for the cliff.

Tonkins and the posse, from both ridges, blazed shot after shot at the running man. Dust kicked about his feet, as he ran five yards, ten yards—and then a wild leap carried the bright yellow slicker into a dark opening.

"Holed up!" came a yell from the cowboys on the far side of the ridge.

"I been in that cave," yelled another cowboy. "She runs in about fifty feet, and then ends. We got him, Carl, sure as anything."

CARL TONKINS yelled quick orders. In response, the men dismounted, tied horses, and took shelter for a battle. On the far side, they tied their horses and started working down the cliff-like ridge, well sheltered from the cave opening. The seven men with Tonkins fired a few rounds. Nothing happened. Tonkins, leaning forward from his sheltering rock, yelled:

"Come out, or we smoke you out. . . ."

His words were cut short as his sombrero sailed from his head. He dropped flat, lucky to find himself alive. The crackling roar of rifles drowned anything Tonkins might have said, as his men went into action. For a few moments, lead answered them from the dark opening. Then it stopped.

Carl Tonkins, his stocky, strong body quivering a little from the fighting, called to cease firing. The men obeyed him quickly, for not alone was he the sheriff, but that red-thatched head of his packed a brain born to command. Level-headed, straight-talking, straighter-shooting, Carl Tonkins had a stubborn determination to accomplish, in the quickest, most effective way, whatever he set out to do.

The Slicker Kid had a steadily increasing string of crimes from robbery of ranchers, stages, storekeepers, to plain downright murder. Getting him under gunfire for the first time in his two years, was a big thing. Capturing him, either alive or dead, was bigger. It would avenge the murder of Sheriff Knowleton, and more. Tonkins heaved a sigh of delight. Mighty fine of old Wynn Noble to drop that hint. Did it mean the old storekeeper's niece had . . . ?

Tonkins had risen slightly as the thoughts were drifting through his brain. He sat down cursing, as a bullet clipped the rock near his head. Flattened, it went howling off through the air. Evidently, the Slicker Kid was still alive, for a sudden rain of lead sprayed the men near Tonkins. One of them, rising, screamed horribly as he spun and fell again.

NO use wasting any more men. Tonkins yelled orders rapidly, to the fellows on the far side. They were sheltered from the cave opening. They gathered big loads of dry wood and brush and dropped it from above in a pile at the cave opening. Soon they had a blazing bonfire there. Then the men sat back, grinning, as they watched the flames rise steadily against the dark opening of the cave.

"He'll come out—or smother!"

Carl Tonkins' voice was stern. The men nearest him grinned. They were almost as eager as he to see the end of the outlaw. One of them said, curiously:

"How come you figured he was goin' to get that horse-buyer's money, Carl?"

"Got tipped off," came the curt answer. "But I ain't tellin' who—for several reasons!"

No one questioned further. Many felt there was some mystery about Tonkins, but discretion kept them silent. A half hour passed without a shot being

fired by either the posse or the badly wanted outlaw. It grew much darker, rapidly. The fire was dying down. More brush was thrown on it, and a quick flare of light came with the thickening smoke.

Suddenly Carl Tonkins came to his feet. He saw the smoke was drawing into the cave entrance. Half the men there knew that cave had only the one opening. Yet the in-drawing smoke meant a draft—and a draft meant another opening. . . .

Ignoring the yells of warning from his men, risking a death shot at every step, Carl Tonkins raced across to the cave. Not a shot came. A second's pause at the fire, and Tonkins ran on with a blazing stick held high in his hand. He dropped his rifle, did not trouble to draw a six-gun—for he already knew the truth.

Fifty feet into the cave, and he came to what should have been a solid rock wall. Instead, he saw where a narrow fissure, once only a crack, had been widened, and that recently. Tonkins crawled up through it, his torch lighting the way. He was in another cave, one of a series in the limestone cliffs. Scrambling and climbing, the acting-sheriff went on.

In ten minutes Tonkins was standing on the summit of the ridge, near where the posse had left the horses. But the horses were gone—and so was the Slicker Kid. Only a new yellow slicker was left, draped mockingly over a bush.

IT was a tough ride back to Mesita, the county seat, for Carl Tonkins. It had taken them nearly an hour to round up the missing horses. One remained lost. The Slicker Kid had once more made his escape. His dead horse and the outfit on it had told them nothing. No one recognized the rig or the unbranded animal.

With the dead posseman back of him, Tonkins took the lead back to town through the darkness. No chance to trail the Slicker Kid now, and mighty little chance on the morrow, for it was horse-range country. No trick at all for the wily, cunning outlaw to lose his tracks in those of countless others. Behind him Tonkins heard the mutter of talk, muffled at first, then clearer. He stiffened in the saddle, his red hair bristling a little, his jaw jutting pugnaciously. They were blaming him!

For a time the stocky acting-sheriff took the talk behind him in silence. If they wanted to blame him for not knowing the cave had been opened into another, all right. If they wanted to blame him for their own bad shooting in not killing the Slicker Kid when under their rifle muzzles, all right, too.

Then something else was said. Tonkins was not quite certain who said it, there in the darkness. But it brought him wheeling his horse to face them. They could not see his face, but that crisp, biting voice told them much.

"If Jeff Morgan said that, he's lying!" said Tonkins. "O' course I want to get the Slicker Kid—who doesn't? He's a murderin' thief who's runnin' wilder an' wilder! But if Morgan says I want to get him so's I'll be elected sheriff next month—he's lyin'! I ain't goin' to run for sheriff! I'm goin' back to my little horse-spread in the hills, so I am!"

"But I'm goin' to get the Slicker Kid before I quit!" he went on. "He killed my best friend—old Sheriff Knowleton. I'm goin' to either jail or kill the Slicker Kid, then I quit. That's my war-talk—an' you can hear me!"

Some of the riders opened their mouths to argue, then thought better of it. Carl Tonkins' courage and resourcefulness were well known. The steadier men in the county knew he would make a fine peace-officer. Knew him, however, well enough to be sure that if he said he was not running for sheriff he was not.

They were right. Carl Tonkins had good reasons for not wanting to remain a peace-officer. Old Sheriff Knowleton had known them, respected them. Only his dire need had made him ask aid of

the young horse-rancher. A plea which had brought swift response. But had not saved Knowleton from the Slicker Kid's ambush.

IT was about nine-thirty when the group of men behind Tonkins split up, on the main street of Mesita. The cowboys from the YP spread rode off to various saloons, to get their "bust" well started. The possemen, their stars turned over to Tonkins, disbanded, to spread the news about town. Again—failure, even though Tonkins had been tipped off that the Slicker Kid was going to hold up the Kansas City horse-buyer that day.

With the dead posseman given to the undertaker, Carl Tonkins strode moodily down the street toward Wynn Noble's home beyond the big Noble store and stage station. Even the thought of seeing Noble's orphaned niece, who had come to live with him six months before, could not cheer the stocky, red-headed sheriff. His mind brooded on the Slicker Kid, the murder of Knowleton, and the many other crimes. Always, that knowledge of where money was to be gained at gun-point, always that ability to evade capture. . . .

As Tonkins swung up onto the dark, vine-clad porch of the Noble house, he saw a slender figure rising from a chair. Lithe, pretty, Mary Noble stepped out to meet the peace-officer, with welcoming smile. Tonkins, as always, felt that choking sense of awed adoration when he saw her. As always, he had to fight that desire to take her in his arms. But he could not, not until he had told her something—perhaps, not then if she did not understand.

"I'll be with you in a few minutes, Mary," he said. "I—I want to talk to your uncle, first. That was a good tip he gave me about the Slicker Kid—but the devil got away again!"

A creaking sound came from the darkness behind Mary. Tonkins knew, before he saw the man, just who it would be. A tall, slender, well-dressed man stepped out from where the big chair and the darkness had concealed him. As the light struck Jeff Morgan it showed a handsome, devil-may-care face, topped with black hair which waved and curled about his head.

A fine looking, well-dressed, likable man, was the first reaction of strangers who met Morgan. And so he was, until the mocking devil which always lurked in his black eyes shone forth. Now, as he faced Tonkins, half-bowing, that mocking devil was dancing plainly in his black eyes:

"Failure, after a tip, won't help at the election!"

Morgan's voice was jibing, cutting. Without waiting for answer, he turned to Mary:

"I'll leave the field, Miss Noble, to our *possibly* future sheriff!"

WITH a quick nod, Jeff Morgan turned and strode down the pathway and disappeared into the darkness. Mary Noble's hand went out in an odd, half-restraining gesture after the disappearing figure. Tonkins winced. Did that mean—she cared?

By the time Mary had turned back, Tonkins was in the house. He walked swiftly across the living-room and into Wynn Noble's bedroom. The gaunt, white-haired storekeeper stared almost wildly at him.

"You didn't get him!" he said in a low voice. "You let him get away—alive!"

Carl Tonkins stared at the sick, broken man. The past six months had brought that change slowly but surely to the once sturdy storekeeper. Now, bedridden and sick, gaunt and white-faced, Wynn Noble seemed a broken, beaten man. Only the care of his niece seemed to carry him on, alive.

"How did you learn, so soon?" Tonkins asked.

A shifty expression came into the older man's eyes:

"I—could tell by your expression," he said.

Tonkins sat down, rolled a smoke, and lighted it from the kerosene lamp beside him on the small table. Rapidly, concisely, he detailed the whole thing. They had, by a scant twenty minutes, missed reaching the horse-buyer before the dreaded Slicker Kid had killed him. He told of the wild, bullet-throwing chase—and the outlaw's tricky escape. Then, bitterly, Tonkins told of the return ride, and his vow to get the Slicker Kid and then return to his ranch.

Wynn Noble, as he heard the vow repeated, seemed to come to life. A sudden flow of blood came into his white cheeks, as he leaned forward and said:

"You're takin' a big chance! This Slicker Kid may hear of that talk—an' get you like he did Knowleton!"

"I'm takin' that chance!" Carl Tonkins' jaw stuck out a little as he spoke. He saw the oddly changed, almost questioning look Noble turned on him, and began to talk, slowly:

"You might as well know now, Noble, just why I came into this deal to help Knowleton an' won't take the sheriff's job if it's given me! Ever hear of Deer Lodge?"

Noble tensed, then nodded.

"Well," Tonkins spoke in a low voice. "I did three years in Deer Lodge, for ridin' the outlaw trail. I was just a kid, an' a little fool! After I got out a friend o' Knowleton's sent me down here to him. He helped me—an' kept his mouth shut. That's why I came in to help him when he needed me. That's why, knowin' that if I'm sheriff, I may meet some o' my old gang, I won't take the job. I squared myself by servin' time for what fool things I did when I was a kid. I'm square with the world, an' I'm keepin' square!"

TONKINS rolled another smoke, but in his tense mood did not light it. He was too intent on his own words to notice Wynn Noble, sitting up now, with an amazed look on his white face.

"I'm tellin' you this," Tonkins ended, "because I love Mary—an' you both ought to know the truth before I ask her to marry me. Then . . ."

Wynn Noble had risen to a sitting position, resting his weight on one hand. His other reached out, trembling a little. On his face was an expression Tonkins read as that of amazement, mixed with a suddenly seen hope:

"You mean—" Noble moistened his lips, then went on: "That you were an outlaw once—an' squared yourself? That you know a man ain't always bad—just 'cause he once breaks laws? That something he can't help may've turned him wrong?"

Tonkins nodded. Of course he knew that. What clear thinking man did not?

"Then, if I told you a fellow—once outlaw, but tryin' to go straight—in a new country—" Noble paused a moment, gathering breath, then continued: "I'm tellin' you, he tried to go straight—but a fellow who knew found him—made him help . . ."

It was a bewildering speech, but Carl Tonkins got the meaning very swiftly. He stared at Noble's pale face and trembling lips for an instant, then nodded slowly:

"So—that's how the Slicker Kid always knew when money was coming in on the stage! That's how he knew so much about what was goin' on. You own the stage line, an' know most o' what goes on here. He has the goods on you, Noble—an' you told him!"

Noble still sat, as though stiffened into the position:

"He made me—threatened to tell—I'd have been hung—or jail for life! It seemed the easiest way—till Mary came out six months ago—then I couldn't stand it! I gave you that hint, thinkin' you'd kill him—an' I wouldn't have to tell Mary the truth!"

Tonkins nodded slowly. He knew, all too well, what a hell Wynn Noble had been living in. The dread of exposure, the horror of Mary's learning the truth, had sickened, almost killed the man. Mental torture, in many ways, can be worse than physical. Some peo-

ple know that—and Tonkins was one of them.

"There's only one thing to square you, Noble," he said quietly, fingering his unlighted cigaret. "Tell me who the Slicker Kid is, so's I can get him. Then —you got to take what's comin' to you!"

"But—Mary—"

"It's comin' to you! I took it, an' I'm glad I did. It squared me with the world—an' myself. You got to take it, Noble. Come clean, now—who's the Slicker Kid?"

"He . . ."

Noble hesitated. Tonkins realized the sick man, beaten and hopeless, was gathering courage to tell him. He quivered a little with excitement. At last, to know who the outlaw really was; to get the murderer of Knowleton—punish, or kill him!

To quiet his nerves, Tonkins leaned over the lamp to light his cigaret. As he did so, he heard the quavering voice of Noble, stronger now, as the old man said:

"I'll do it. I've got to do it, Tonkins. The Slicker Kid is . . ."

THE whole room shook with the crashing roar of a gun. Tonkins, leaning over the lamp to light his cigaret, made one instinctive move. It was to crash the lamp to the floor, putting it out. As he did so, he dropped, jerking his gun out. A flash of light stabbed at him from the window. He fired at it, then heard running feet.

Leaping to his feet, Tonkins ran to the window and jumped out. As he hit the ground, he saw quick stabbing flashes fifty yards away. Lead spattered the wall back of him, did not touch him. He fired rapidly, emptying his gun. A queer, almost animal-like scream answered, then more shots. A scant two seconds, and Tonkins had reloaded. He started forward, throwing lead in a steady stream. Something caught his foot, he fell. As he did so, rolling over, he heard the quickening rattle of horse's hoofs. Then, the sound died away.

Carl Tonkins struggled to his feet. He realized that the gunmen had escaped. The night was black, without light. Their flight would be swift, sure, impossible to trail.

Before he could run to the stables to get horses, they would be far away, lost in the darkness.

He believed it must have been the dreaded Slicker Kid, trying to prevent Wynn Noble from telling who he was. But the outlaw worked alone, and there had been three men in that group.

Back into the house. Tonkins stopped in the bedroom door, his face grim. Mary, white-faced, was standing stiffly beside the bed. Wynn Noble lay a motionless heap. There was a black hole in the middle of his forehead. Again had the Slicker Kid won.

HALF an hour later Carl Tonkins stood in the dimly lighted parlor of the Knowleton home, where he lived while in town. He watched the old sheriff's widow put an arm across Mary Noble's shoulder and lead her from the room. The girl did not once look back. On the way over to the Knowleton home, Tonkins had told her not alone the truth about her uncle, but about his own past. He had done that, not willingly at such a tragic time, but because she had heard enough of the talk between Wynn Noble and himself to demand an explanation. When that had been given her, she had made one remark, nothing more:

"I'm sorry I ever came to such a terrible country!"

A few minutes later Mrs. Knowleton was back in the room. She was a fragile little woman with snow-white hair. Her face, a network of kindly wrinkles, was made almost youthful by keen, bright eyes. The rough life of the pioneer woman, which she had known for over fifty years, had taken its toll from her body, but had not touched a fine, courageous and kindly soul. For fifteen minutes she listened to the low flow of

words from Carl Tonkins, her bright eyes never once leaving his face. As he finished, she said quietly:

"You're gambling with death to go alone and meet three of them!"

"I'll gamble—with my guns!" he said, "'cause I can't prove it in court. If I take a posse, he'll laugh at me, and get free at the trial. If I go alone—seemingly at his mercy—there's just a chance he'll admit the truth before he tries to kill me. Perhaps he'll kill me, perhaps I'll get him—perhaps we'll both die. But at least I'll have made my try at getting the Slicker Kid before he murders any one else!"

Mrs. Knowleton nodded slowly. Her lips tightened a little as she said:

"I wish I could go with you!"

Carl Tonkins laughed softly at the fighting expression on the gentle old lady's face. His hand softly pressed her shoulder by way of farewell. Then:

"If I don't come back—tell Mary I loved her a lot."

It was very simply said, yet it brought tears into Mrs. Knowleton's eyes. Before she could clear them, Carl Tonkins was striding out into the darkness.

IT was not long after dawn when Carl Tonkins rode up to a log hut, set back against a rocky ridge. Near it, on the fenced-in meadow, were some grazing horses. On the ridge, fifty yards from the cabin, was a mine-dump, with the dark shaft opening just above. It was a rich mine, according to reports, or three men could not take so much gold from it. Tonkins grinned a little thinly as he wondered if all their gold came from the mine—or from the Slicker Kid's many crimes?

"Out early, ain't you, Sheriff?"

The voice was mocking, as usual. Tonkins nodded as he swung out of the saddle and faced the speaker—Jeff Morgan.

Beside Morgan in the doorway stood one of his two men—which one no man but Jeff Morgan himself could tell so alike were the two black fellows. The two big, squatty built men seldom spoke, were reputedly part Negro, part Indian—and all devil. To these hard-faced, glowering-eyed fellows, Morgan's words were law—their only law.

Knowing that, seeing only the one man beside Morgan, Carl Tonkins looked for the other. He saw, beyond the two figures in the doorway, a man lying in a bunk inside the cabin. Then—the door shut, cutting off his view as Morgan and his man stepped outside. Tonkins stood, his feet slightly apart, facing them. They were both armed, of course, and Tonkins was glad he had buckled on two guns instead of his usual one.

"I'm on the trail o' the Slicker Kid," he said at last, explaining his presence.

Morgan's dark eyes glowed, as the devil danced in them:

"Think you'll find him here?"

Tonkins answered the jeering question instantly:

"Signs point that way," he said. "Nobody knew Wynn Noble gave me the tip about yesterday, until I spilled it on the porch—not knowin' you was there. Noble knew, before I said a word, that I didn't get the Slicker Kid. I'm thinkin' he knew it—because he saw *you* there!"

MORGAN and his man stood like statues, motionless. But the light was dancing devilishly in Morgan's eyes. Tonkins went on:

"When you found out Noble had given me the tip, you went off, got your two men, come back an' tried to kill us both. You killed Noble, before he had a chance to name you. You didn't get me, but I think I punctured one o' your men. That's why he's lyin' in the bunk, there, and not outside with you—waitin' to kill me for what I know!"

Morgan laughed, a low, chuckling laugh that rose slightly as he finished. There was nothing to be read from his dark face, saturnine expression. But his brain was seething with malicious joy. He felt the red-headed acting-

sheriff had played into his hands. Last night, Morgan and his men had stopped Noble's confession—so nothing could be proved against him, he thought. Now, only the suspicions, right as they were, of this man whom Morgan hated, wanted dead. But the moment was not quite there. Morgan spoke, jeeringly:

"You're only guessing, Tonkins, or you would have brought a posse with you! I think you're guessing because you know Mary cares more for me than you! But—"

Carl Tonkins broke into the words with a sharp order:

"Stand still, damn you!"

He had been quick to note the sidling figure of the black fellow, moving away from his master. Neither Morgan nor the black fellow had as yet made a move to draw, but that attempt to get Tonkins from two angles meant gun-play was ominously close.

Morgan laughed at the sharp order, mockingly. He said something in a strange, guttural language. The black fellow, without change of expression, stopped in his tracks. Tonkins stood without any attempt to draw. His eyes, with the lids lowering slightly to peer better, were fixed on Morgan.

"I'd like to hear you admit I figured it out right," Tonkins said. And he laughed softly as he ended: "Before the shootin' starts!"

AN admiring look came into Morgan's eyes, for the cold-blooded nerve of the man. A man, facing death before two gunmen, seldom laughs. Morgan nodded his head, without moving his eyes.

"Yes—you guessed right," he said. "An' just to add to your satisfaction, after you're dead I'm goin' to marry . . ."

Tonkins, from the corner of his eyes, caught just the hint of movement from the black fellow. It was enough. His hands flashed down and up. The roar of their sudden explosions mingled with others. The black fellow, his teeth showing like yellow fangs, was shooting fast. Then he went down.

Tonkins felt a numbing jar against his right shoulder. It spun him slightly around and the gun dropped from his limp hand.

Firing with his left hand, Tonkins threw lead at Morgan standing in the doorway. Morgan went staggering back against the door, his heels catching on the step. It opened and he disappeared falling at full length. Without knowing it, Tonkins had been hit again, in the thigh. He sent two quick shots from his left-hand gun at the crouching black fellow. A weird, animal-like scream came in answer. The black fellow went down, lips drawing wide over his gleaming yellow teeth.

Half staggering, fighting to draw himself together, Carl Tonkins started for the door of the hut. He heard a quick scrambling inside, then a shot came dangerously close to his head. He could feel the quick disturbance of air by his left ear. Half running, half diving, Tonkins threw himself toward the wall of the cabin. It was shelter, for a brief instant, if no more. Weakness was coming over him—and Morgan still lived.

Fighting for nerve-power to keep on, Tonkins caught a glimpse of movement at the door. He fired his last shot at it, received only another shot in answer. Scrambling, Tonkins reached the corner of the cabin and disappeared around it. A bullet clipped the heel off his boot as he went. He held his gun between his knees to reload it with shaking left hand. Saw, for the first time, the welling blood in his thigh. A grin twitched across his homely face, lighted it for an instant, was gone.

Just nerve dragged the badly wounded Tonkins to his feet. Just iron will, and determination to kill Morgan. Grim determination to finish the job he had started, carried him to his feet.

Swaying, staggering, Tonkins stepped to the window, peered in. The black fellow in the bunk fired. Tonkins shot once, saw him collapse. Something

roared loudly at the far corner of the building. Hot, searing lead bit into his right arm just below the elbow. That would be Morgan. He wheeled, shooting even as he did so.

Five shots in his left-hand gun. One of them must get to that devil who danced so weirdly before his filming eyes. He triggered a steady, straight stream of death. The weird, blurred figure stopped dancing.

Tonkins laughed, eerily. Everything was going in circles, fogging over. There was a horse some place around, his horse. Couldn't make it, of course. His knees weren't stiff enough, somehow. He swayed, lurched, reached the front corner of the cabin. Then, falling flatly, he hit the ground face down.

IT was three days later when Carl Tonkins, swathed in bandages, opened his eyes to conscious sight. He was in his little room at Mrs. Knowleton's home. Someone, he couldn't be certain who, gave him something to drink. He sighed happily and went to sleep—a real sleep that time. It was late afternoon when he awoke. The sunlight came low through the open window on a lithe, slender figure at the foot of the bed. He could barely hear someone talking.

"Yes, you're going to live!" A choked sob of happiness stopped the words. Then they continued. "Mrs. Knowleton sent some men out to bring you back. They found enough evidence to prove you were right about the Slicker Kid!"

Tonkins blinked almost owlishly as the voice went on.

"No, I'm not sorry you killed Jeff Morgan, I'm glad!"

A brief pause.

"No, I wouldn't be offended if a man brave enough to fight back after being in the penitentiary asked me to marry him!"

Tonkins opened his mouth two or three times in utter bewilderment—what did it all mean, anyhow? The voice went on.

"Yes, I'd like to live on a horse-ranch —with you!"

"Mary!" Mrs. Knowleton spoke amazedly from the doorway: "What on earth are you doing?"

"Just answering a few questions Carl asked me while he was out of his head!"

She moved around to the side of the bed, her eyes dancing happily. Her pretty head bent down, and her lips brushed his.

"Now—go back to sleep," she whispered, "and get well quickly!"

WIRE TROUBLE

WHEN direct wire communication between Dallas and El Paso failed, telephone linemen found a huge Mexican eagle tangled in the wires. It was carrying a trap on one claw and had evidently become hopelessly entangled in a desperate fight for freedom. That eagle, seven feet from one wing tip to the other, disrupted six hundred miles of telephone and telegraph service.

From the north comes a similar report—that is, somewhat similar. Thousands of caribou were packed in a canyon near Anchorage, Alaska. That's all right, but the Alaska railroad runs through that canyon, and telegraph and telephone wires follow the tracks. The first part of the immense herd swept out the wires and demolished the supporting tripods. Linemen sent out to repair the damage had to flee for their lives as successive waves of frantic animals stampeded through the passage.

Telephone and telegraph companies attention! Hire a few animal tamers and you'll save wear and tear on your linemen.

STORM THROUGH!

By ART LAWSON

NORTH—Dick Pierce dogged the trail of a back-shooter through a white-death blizzard to win a strange victory in the face of the Snow God's decree.

PAT CASEY, young, broad-shouldered, stepped jauntily down the hall and shoved through the door of his room. Yellow burning eyes looked at him furtively through the dim light. Yellow glinting gold dust slipped through thick fingers, sifting to a pile on the rough board table, like the snow falling heavily outside.

Pat stopped dead—astonished, frozen in his tracks. Motionless, too, the shadowy figure of the intruder, greedy hands claw-like over the gold. Pat's brain was whirling crazily, suddenly thrown into a mad jumble of flashing thoughts. Ed Stanhope! His own partner! Thief!

Suddenly Pat stepped from the hallway into the room. He snapped the door shut behind him. His blue eyes darkened. Then he spoke, and his voice was harsh, trembling with half tempered emotion.

"What are you doin' with my poke?"

Two years of hard work in the bitter cold to gather this precious bag of dust, two years of freezing hell with the promise of heaven at the end, and then this mangey cur, this *partner* grinned in his face even as he was caught . . . stealing! It was too much.

"Get out! Get out o' here," he yelled, striding to the middle of the room. "Get out. You hear?"

The thief leaped aside with a harsh laugh, and at the same moment blue steel flashed over the glittering dust on the table. Young Casey whirled around, dropped to the floor. Red flame spat out viciously and a chunk of lead ripped into the wooden door frame behind him.

Before the grinning devil could trigger again, Pat's own .45 crashed twice. The older man's gun clattered to the floor. The impact of lead smashing his shoulder-blade spun him around. And the second bullet drove into his back, snapped the spine.

There was no outcry. Stanhope crumpled lifeless on the rough hewn boards where a moment before he had crouched like a beast gloating over the stolen wealth.

Hush of death gripped the murky room. The smoky flame of the oil lamp flickered dully, leapt upward with a slight motion of air. A sticky black-looking pool widened around the dead man. Then the killer struggled to his feet. His broad shoulders loomed, a sinister shadow over the floor. There was a soft sliding sound and a click as his gun slid back into the leather. Light hurried steps sounded out in the hallway.

Pat Casey stood swaying, as if he didn't quite understand.

Ed Stanhope, three years together, working, slaving—thief—and now . . . Pat's strong hands brushed his yellow curly hair back from his forehead.

THE door swung open swiftly with a shrill creaking sound. The knob banged against the wall. There was a ringing silence for a moment, then a sharp painful gasp as if from one jolted hard.

Pat turned his heavy, staring eyes slowly. Framed in the brighter light of the hall stood a slight short-skirted girl. Her warm red lips were twisted in horror, her blue eyes wide open in surprise. Spread fingers forced into her black hair as if holding her head from falling. She looked at Casey, then, reluctantly, at the dead man.

"I killed him," Pat said simply. "I shot him."

"Yes," said the girl.

As if with an effort she braced herself against the door jamb, her eyes fixed on his, darkly blue and troubled. Somehow they didn't seem really his eyes, usually crinkled up at the corner with laughter.

"Pat," she said at last. "Why . . ." and her white hand swept in a hopeless little arc toward the still figure on the floor.

There was no change of expression on his round, honest face. His firm curved lips moved and words sounded, but an automaton might have formed them. "He was swipin' my poke. So I killed him. He plugged at me first, an' I hadda do . . . something." He stood frowning at the dead man. "I didn't think he had the nerve. Always itchin' to get his dirty paws on my dust though. I mighta known."

Pat was still staring at his dead partner. "But look, Janie," he said pointing slowly. "My second shot went through his back!"

The girl turned to stare too, and, as realization swept over her, she reached out to him instinctively. "Oh, Pat. You'll have to go."

He took both her hands, looking down into her eyes for belief. "It was self-defense. But there was no witnesses. An' I shot him in the back, didn't I?"

When Janie spoke, her voice was low. Hardly even a whisper.

"I believe you, but *they* won't. They hang you for that. Hang you for shootin' a man in the back."

"No they don't," he said harshly. "No. I'm goin' to git, an' they can't get me."

He flung his arms around her and hugged her tight to him. The two trembled in close embrace. "Janie," he whispered, snuggling his face in her warm black hair. "Janie, life wouldn't be much of anythin' without you. I'd near as well dangle. Only listen: we're goin' Outside. Sooner than we planned, that's all."

"All right, dear."

"Janie!"

For a moment they were oblivious of the world about them. The sound of the front door slamming brought them back.

"You'd better run," she said, pushing herself away from him.

He leaned over, brushed the gold into the moosehide poke. "Take this," he said, giving her the bag, almost too heavy for a girl to carry. "An' get Ed's too. He won't need it. Meet me at the shack a couple of miles west of Blue Goose Creek in five days."

He kissed her again on the lips, turned, and ran across the room. "You

know where I mean?" he said, stopping at the window.

She nodded her head, eyes bright. "In five days," she said.

For a second he held himself poised there on the sill, then dropped into the heavy snow.

Janie ran noiselessly from the room.

ABOUT the middle of the morning the district's new Mounted Policeman, Dick Pierce, mushed into Moose Leg. It was his first trek up to the Old Crow country, and he'd taken his time on the trail, carefully inspecting his caches, making complete mental notes of landmarks.

He was a couple of days late already on his regular beat, so when he didn't show up in town on the expected day and hour, Burt Wellman, the decrepit old constable, mushed on down the trail to fetch him. Burt didn't feel up to hitting the trail of the killer himself, but it was clearly his duty to report to the mountie as soon as possible.

They met only a few miles out of town, were still talking about the killing when they drew to a halt in the main drag. By that time Wellman had told about all he knew of Pat Casey. Big, round-faced guy, he thought. Had blond curly hair, though he couldn't swear to it because Casey never showed up downstreet without his red-fox cap. Landed in town with the partner he'd done in now, and always headed for McCreary's boarding-house. Stuck around up there all the time he was in town . . . probably sweet on Mike's daughter. Then with no more warning than he'd left this time, he generally mushed out with Stanhope, heading up toward the Peel River. Left unexpected like that so no one could follow him. Mysterious couple of gents anyhow. By this time Casey must be heading west for the MacDougall Pass and Alaska. Wellman was sure of that.

Not much to go on, Pierce thought. And in Dorlan's Pearly Gates Saloon it looked suspiciously as though they were definitely trying to confuse him. Some said Casey was a big, hulking man-mauler, a sullen pup if there ever was one. Others swore he was a jovial, hail-fellow-well-met guy, middle-sized, loud-mouthed. . . .

Pierce ducked out of the motley crowd of too-helpful sourdoughs, dragging Burt Wellman with him.

"Listen here," he said. "There's only one thing that these tongue-wagging fools agree on, and that's that Casey and Stanhope hung around McCreary's diggin's on account of his kid Janie. Where is McCreary's? Tell me that and no more."

"Up 'tother end o' the drag. Last joint more than a shake shack. But McCreary ain't home. He's out huntin' caribou."

"I want to see the girl, anyway," Pierce answered.

PIERCE left his dogs with Wellman and ploughed through the drifting snow to McCreary's boarding house. It was a pretentious structure for that town, two stories high, solidly built. There was no knocker on the door and the latch was out, so Pierce took the hint and walked in. He found the black-haired girl in the kitchen working over the sink.

"Pardon me, Miss," he said hesitatingly.

She jumped back nervously when he spoke and a cup fell from her fingers, smashing on the floor. They both leaned over at once to pick it up. Pierce noticed that her shoulders were trembling. Then as she stood up, her long hair gently brushed his face and for the moment he forgot her shoulders.

Her blue eyes were filled with tears when she finally looked up at him. A glistening drop ran down beside her turned up nose to her full red mouth. The lean young mountie stood silently holding the broken pieces of china in one powerful brown hand, staring at the girl's remarkable beauty.

She held out her hand for the remains of the smashed cup and dropped

the pieces tinkling in the trash box.Then she broke the silence.

"You startled me," she said. Just that.

He looked at her queerly. Any fool could see he'd scared her. Was everyone in town handing him a song and dance? Better not fool with the law. But as he spoke he had to try to make his voice matter of fact and force his trail starved senses loose from this girl. She fascinated him curiously.

"I'm a mounted policeman," he said. "I got to get some information from you. I want to know about this Casey. What do you know about . . ."

Her weak, tired voice broke in and stopped him short. "Wasn't it awful to get shot that way? To get shot in the back with no chance."

She flung her arms around the startled mountie and began to sob pitifully. He might have been her father the way she did it.

"Darlin', darlin', Eddie," she gasped with her face buried against the big man's chest.

"Was *he* your feller? The dead one?"

"Yes." She looked up at him and he instinctively drew away from her. Her beauty was permeating, seemed as if it would hold him, control, compel—and it had been a long time since he had been so close to a woman.

"An' that awful Casey will get away," she was saying. "He headed out over the east trail last night—headed up toward the river for more gold. I saw him go. An' he's got good dogs."

Her voice faded out.

This didn't match with what the constable had told him. But Wellman was just guessing. And the girl had seen the man leave. Her arms burned around Pierce's neck.

"I knew he'd do it," she went on without waiting for the mountie to speak. "Eddie was such a gentleman, an' Pat wanted all the gold." Her lips became a tight line. "He used to be a decent fellow, Casey. But now he'd kill anybody for his dust."

PIERCE could have listened to her musical voice forever. He hardly heard her words. He was listening to the tone. But what she said burned deep into his memory. Then he suddenly became irritated at himself and pushed her away from his chest. She slumped down heavily in a nearby chair.

"I want to know some things," he said almost harshly.

"I'll do anything," she vowed. "Anything if you can just get that murderer."

"Well, what's he look like?" he snapped. "The fools down at the village don't even know him."

"He's got black eyes . . . with a dirty gleam in them," she said slowly after remaining silent for a split second.

"I don't care about his eyes. What's he look like?" The mountie caught her up gruffly.

"An' his hair is long and black. I think he's a breed," she said.

Pierce, ever suspicious, glared at her. "That's a lie," he shouted. "Down in town they say his hair is light and curly."

The girl crouched back in her chair. She drew up her legs as if escaping from something vile on the floor. Her candid blue eyes looked up at him imploringly and her lips quivered with half-controlled sobs.

He felt suddenly cheap for talking to her that way. He muttered, "Maybe they didn't know." She didn't speak or acknowledge his remark. He was apologetic. "I'm sorry. Go on, please."

Hesitatingly she gave him all the details he asked for. But she gave them in her own way. Her eyes were half closed and her body tensed as she spoke. Finally Pierce had enough to go on. He thanked her and turned to leave.

The girl ran up and stopped him at the outer door. She stood a bit away from him, and smiled up through her tears.

"You *will* get him. Won't you?" she said hopefully.

"Janie," he blurted out, "I'd do any . . ." Then he stopped, embarrassed.

"I mean, thank you, Miss."

Then before he opened the door she stood on her toes and kissed him impulsively, once on each cheek. Blood rushed to his face as he hurried out to the open air.

As he stumbled through the glistening snow an hour later his cheeks were burning with the never to be forgotten kisses. He strode along in a trance behind his dogs, always away from the declining sun.

Back at McCreary's, Janie drew a great sigh of relief and turned again to her dishes.

MEMORIES of the strange beautiful girl furrowed the policeman's wind-tanned brow as he ran on over the smooth trail. His powerful lean body swung in an easy rhythm behind his dogs. But he felt strangely bewildered. Then as his keen eyes picked out signs of the fugitive on the path ahead of him the deep lines on his forehead began to fade away. Yes, the girl had given him a good tip. The man he was after had gone this way.

Someone alone had traveled the trail ahead. He had a powerful dog team that covered miles and miles between stops. And the sledge was loaded light for speed. The double packed runner lines led east, slightly north, toward the Peel River.

The steady pull of the dogs gave strength to the confused man. As he ran on to the singing of the runners on the light snow a faint smile flowed over his lean face and his feet became lighter as they chugged on in their heavy mukluks.

He passed sign of a hurried camp. Probably the place where this Casey had prepared a quick meal about dawn of the same day. Then late in the afternoon, when the low sun shone faintly over the barren snow the mountie passed a second camp. His trained eye told him that this was more leisurely than the the first. The killer must have prepared a hearty meal here and rested for some time. At the most he could be only a few hours ahead.

But black clouds were thrusting fingers over the sun far to the south. Overhead they were packing into a tight mass, darkening the sky. Bitter wind pressed ever more strongly against him as he forged ahead. In the last rays of the dying sun Pierce pitched camp and bedded down for a long night's sleep.

He awoke early, with the wind blowing softly about him and snow drifting down through the black. He looked at his radium-dialed watch. Five o'clock already, and dawn still four hours away. Then he climbed stiffly out of his warm reindeer sleeping bag.

In a few minutes he had a fire crackling and piled it high with logs. He whistled to his dogs and threw frozen dried fish to them when they clambered out of their warm drifts. Then while they munched the tasteless meal he prepared breakfast for himself.

By six he was mushing on in the dark, heading easterly, hunting vainly for trail sign. But he was sure he was on the right track for he kept to the low reaches where traveling was the easiest and the trail was sure to be. When gray daylight finally came he had put a good many miles behind him. Then in the first light of day he found Casey's night camp.

WITH the day came the first of winter's storms. The snow whirled everywhere, biting wind drove it into Pierce's half closed eyes, drove it through the stiff hair coats of the steaming huskies. Drifts piled higher, wiping out all sign of the hunted man. But about ten o'clock the mountie passed an almost obliterated camp site. He never would have found it if the wind hadn't swept the ground clear and bared a blackened circle in the reindeer moss where the fire had burned.

He expected to come on his man that night, within an hour or two after sunset. So he pushed on into the bitter wind even after the long shadows had

melted into one. It cut sharper as night deepened and the sandy snow stung like bird shot. But the husky team pulled on steadily and the end of the trail beckoned the mountie on. Had there been a little light Pierce would have seen trail sign only two hours old.

He was ready to give up and pitch camp when a pale glimmering ahead gave him courage. Quick figuring told him that he must have passed the hunted man by now or lost him in the storm. This light could not be his. But it would be shelter or companionship.

He pushed on and watched it grow and change. It became a window. Then there was a blacker hulk behind it. Yowling huskies were answered by the mountie's team. Then a streamer of light burst across the wastes and a young man's voice called to his dogs.

Pierce clumped heavily through the open doorway to the warmth within. The stranger held his arm to steady him in the first sickening change of temperature. Then Pierce shook the snow from his face and parka, swung his arms and stamped his feet. Bacon frying on the stove and corn bread baking in the oven filled the little shack with a heartening aroma.

"Take it easy," the young chap said cordially. "I'll fix your malamutes."

He strode over to the corner to get feed for the dogs, then went out into the swirling night. A moment later he returned in a flurry of snow. He threw Pierce's sleeping roll down on the floor. Pierce was standing over in the corner, near the reddening stove, warming his ungloved hands. He looked up when his host came in loaded down with his duffle. There was a suspicious glint in his eyes.

"What's your name," he snapped. It was a trick to get his man off guard.

"Mike Cassidy," the younger man said quickly, a little too quickly maybe. "Why?"

Pierce looked at him cautiously. Looked him over thoroughly, slowly. Blue eyes, round healthy face, fair curly hair, broad shoulders and narrow hips. He was thinking of what Wellman had told him. He was also thinking of what the girl had said. But she had given him the only sensible steer. At least she had put him on a trail.

"Been here long?" Pierce snapped.

"Two days," the other answered. "Look here . . ." he began to object.

"Seen a black looking gent any place?" the mountie asked, cutting into the stranger's words.

"Sure," the younger man said. "Sure I seen one. Drove past in a hurry this afternoon. Took a shot at me when I said hello."

"All I wanted to know." The mountie looked a bit foolish. "Thanks," he said.

Funny how his hunches were always wrong this trip. Funny how he still thought the black-haired girl had lied to him. He didn't see the queer look the young Irish-American gave him, nor the shrug of his shoulders as he put on more supper to cook.

Later, as the night wore on, Pierce dug a little brandy out of his cariole. He was still a bit puzzled by the affable stranger. But the good meal and the warm brandy made them the best of friends. Soon they were talking freely of their past doings, adventures, trails they had mushed.

Pierce liked the warm-hearted chap who said he was a trapper and a mail runner. The mountie might have wondered why he had never tried prospecting, had never gotten the gold lure. But he said nothing. It was cozy and warm in the little cabin and Mike was a fine gent.

Pierce hesitated to open up on the subject that was foremost in his mind. But finally he casually asked, "You know a fellow called Pat Casey?"

THE stranger twitched suddenly. His feet came down from the rail around the hot stove. His words were short spoken.

"Sort of think so," he said. "Sort of think I used to know him once long ago up north. Placer miner."

Apparently Pierce hadn't noticed the strange change in the other man. He expanded his subject.

"Tell you why I wanted to know. He killed a man west of here two days ago. Down in Moose Leg. Shot his partner and I'm after him. Thought he'd be heading back toward his gold strike. My first man since I been on the force." He was beaming now. He liked to talk of himself and the "force." He liked ready listeners and the man Mike was one of the best.

The stranger's face tightened very slightly. His words didn't flow as easily or casually as they had all evening. His blue eyes were no longer steady.

"I wonder," he said. "Was that the fellow mushed by so hard today?"

"Musta been," said the mountie. "I thought at first maybe you might be him." He leaned back thoughtfully. He was about to say something else to Mike, ask him about the beautiful girl, too. But he did not have a chance to go on. Slightly strained, fast-spoken words, broke into his line of thought.

"That must of been the fellow. Dark looking gent. A breed. A little wiry gent."

Pierce straightened up suddenly. The box he was sitting on creaked ominously under the change of weight.

"A what?" he almost yelled.

The stranger was looking toward the bolted door. Little waves appeared in his glass of brandy as his hand trembled.

"A little wiry gent, a breed," he said softly.

The mountie looked him over carefully again, face muscles taut, the earlier suspicion in his eyes.

"Yeh. A little wiry gent." He looked narrowly at Mike. A note of sarcasm crept into his voice. 'He's a smart guy, this Casey. A remarkable guy. A friend of his, Janie McCreary, says he's a breed too. A dark looking gent."

His eyes were searching for any trace of emotion on Mike's face. He noticed a gleam of hope, an undefinable softening of his expression, when he told what the girl had said.

He watched carefully as he prepared his bomb. His hand was creeping toward the black stock of his service revolver. He remembered now that the affable Mike had kept his .45 strapped on all evening.

"But Janie says," each word was delivered with a heavy upper cut drive, "Janie says he was big, powerful, and a murderer." He noticed the young man wince. The corners of his lips twitched ever so slightly. "An' the constable says he's blond, with curly yellow hair and blue eyes." He bit off his last words. Mike sprang to his feet. The mountie went for his gun.

The revolver slithered out of its oiled holster. The cold handle sent tingling life through the policeman's veins. But the gun hovered in his clenched fist, never cleared the table top. A black .45 muzzle was staring him in the face.

For a deathly moment Pierce gazed into that hole. His slitted eyes shifted to a finger tightening over the trigger, then to a strong hand gripping tightly over the butt, and a heavy thumb holding back the hammer. Red flame and soft lead. Then cold snow for a grave. And back at Dawson they would be wondering what had happened to him. What a fool he had been to be taken in by that girl's smart acting. What a fool, and he facing the killer.

For a deathly moment the gun hung steady, as if crouching for a spring before it flung into bone crushing action. For a deathly moment all life seemed to cease. Both men's muscles froze, ready to snap and crumble at the crash of the .45.

Then curly-head shrugged his shoulders. His gun clicked uncocked. He turned it around in his big hand, passed it calmly to the mountie, handle first.

"Had you easy," he muttered. "Could of got you. But I'd rather dangle than kill an innocent man doing his duty. Couldn't do it." He slumped down on a box by the table. All life gone out of

him, limp as a rag. No fight. Just dead flesh.

"I'm Pat Casey, all right," he said. "You can take me back and hang me up. An' I don't care." Now Pat's gun clicked again, trained on its owner. He laughed bitterly. "An' I thought that mounties were blokes."

A moment later silvery anklets clicked, clamped and were locked. And their twins, handcuffs, quickly followed suit.

THE next morning the storm was still howling. Snow drifted across the floor of the little cabin, coming through minute cracks, melting, turning into rivulets. Pierce got up and prepared breakfast. Then he unlocked Casey's anklets, dropped them deep in a pocket.

Pat remained motionless, unspeaking, in his bunk. Haggard lines creased his usually happy face. Desperation of a man fighting against death and his own stupidity, hardened his jaw, forced a cold glitter into his eyes.

As breakfast progressed he got up, paced up and down the rough creaking floor. His arms clinked handcuffs behind him. His chin was buried in his chest. By the time both men had eaten he was as wild and sullen as the storm outside.

Suddenly Pat stopped pacing, glowered at Pierce.

"Fat chump I am," he said bitterly. "Could have had you last night."

"Yellow," the mountie said laconically.

"Yellow," Pat spat out the word. "Just soft." He looked Pierce straight in the eyes. Something in his expression and his words struck into the mountie's spine.

"But I won't be soft again," Pat said. "An' you won't get me to any gallows either."

That was all.

Pierce got up wearily from his breakfast, chained his charge temporarily to an upright on the bunks, and went out into the storm. Soon he had the two sleds lashed together. Two teams of dogs were made into one. Wind tore at the mountie's clothes as he worked. He fought desperately to lash the duffle down securely.

Then he unchained Casey and helped him dress in warm mukluks and parka, tied his red fox cap down snugly on his head. He put heavy gloves on the prisoner's hands, then locked the steel cuffs over them.

He led Casey out to his own sledge, strapped him to the battens and lashed a Hudson's Bay blanket and a tarp over him. He took one last look at the cozy little shack, then grasping the gee pole of his own sled, he mushed back toward Moose Leg.

The dogs bit into the drifting snow and the searing wind. The man ran heavily on behind them, leaning into the almost solid wall of the blizzard. For hours he fought on blindly, using dog instinct as his guide. He sensed rather than knew he was on the right trail.

At noon camp he stopped behind a clump of wind-lashed spruce on the lee side of a small knoll. The snow had drifted deep in there but there was a slight respite from the wind. He fed his dogs first, then went over to see how his captive was getting along. He pulled him out of the woolly cocoon.

His eyes opened wide in horror.

Pat was blue with the cold, numb and practically lifeless. His teeth had stopped chattering, he wasn't even shivering. The mountie cursed himself for a fool, unmanacled Casey and made him run around. Then he lit a huge fire and the two hunkered up to its life-giving warmth.

Pat was silent, black of mood. Desperation blurred his eyes and held his tongue. He ate his warm food slowly, and gradually gained back frozen energy. Pierce finally broke the silence hesitatingly.

"I can't let you freeze to death," he said. "Even murderers can't be killed that way. But I can't let you go free. I

have to take you back. Will you make a deal, a sportsman's deal?"

The captive hesitated for a moment. "What is it?" he asked.

"I'll let you run your sled yourself, ahead of me. Keep moving, keep alive. Only don't try to get away or do anything until tomorrow night, sundown. We should be in Moose Leg by then."

"I'll do it," said Casey.

But as they mushed on the mountie kept his revolver handy, ready for instant use if Casey did not remain true to his word. He might have made another fool's move here.

PAT led the way mushing on silently behind his husky team. The dogs were pulling the bravest they had ever done, plunging through heavy drifts, cutting the searing wind. Close behind was the mountie, ever watchful for an untoward move.

That night Pat slept while Pierce kept the fire going. The mountie slept too, fitfully, between forages for wood, the two guns strapped close to his body.

Through the third day of the blizzard the two men mushed many silent miles in the teeth of a stinging snow-laden wind. Along about noon Pierce began looking for signs of the town. He was sure they were almost there, sure they couldn't have missed the trail and gone past Moose Leg.

While they were chewing on their hot beans and bacon he spoke the first word either had uttered since the day before.

"Pretty near town, aren't we?" he asked.

"Day off yet," Pat answered. "Make it by midnight." Then a little bitterly, a little sullenly, he added, "An' I stop being good come sundown."

At sundown they stopped for another bit to eat. Pierce flung frozen fish to the tired dogs. Then he settled down to prepare a meal for himself and his prisoner. It was dark now. His agreement with Pat was over. But the young American made no move to escape. So Pierce waited until they had eaten.

Then he pulled the handcuffs out from his parka. He held them up and let the light of the fire glint red on them. They chinked in the cold air as he swung them.

"Guess I gotta use these bracelets tonight," he said. He stood up, a lean shadow in the gloom. He looked questioningly at Casey. "Unless you're not goin' to be bad like you said."

Casey too stretched up from his squatting position. His tall body was tense, tight. He laughed derisively at the Mountie, laughed again.

"Too late," he said. "I'm goin' to be bad. An' you better hang me right now. For I'm leavin' in a second."

The mountie took one step forward to grasp Casey's wrists. But Pat's panther-like muscles flexed quick, he swung half way around, and Pierce's arms were pinned in a steel grasp. Casey looked squint-eyed in his face, his jaw shoved close to Pierce.

"Too late," he said. "I warned you. Deal was off half an hour ago. I'm not goin' to be soft this time." His long leg thrust out, caught Pierce behind the knee, and before the mountie could recover from his astonishment, a slight push on his helpless arms sent him hurl- into the snow.

Casey calmly turned his back, grasped the gee pole of his sled, called to the dogs, broke loose, and mushed off into the night.

Then Pierce sprang to life. He pulled his cold gun, fired two shots at the fugitive, deliberately missing. But Pat never batted an eye. He just kept on mushing away. In another second he would be lost in the black snowfall. The mountie was a man who couldn't shoot even a murderer in the back. He couldn't pump lead into the back of an unarmed man.

So he stumbled wearily to his feet, and battled on into the storm. Hours piled on hours of heavy going. Bitter winds cutting with razor edged snow. Husky dogs beginning to fail under the awful pressure. But doggedly he kept

on after his man. Kept on his heels all the way, unable to make up an inch on that short lead, barely seeing him in the black.

The pace was terrific. Man and dogs were weakening. The lead string was losing out almost as rapidly as the last. Hour after hour the powerful teams kept up that pace. Hour after hour the two husky men chugged heavily through the snow until sheer weariness seemed to crush them down brutally. Pierce couldn't gain an inch. But he never lost one.

Then a faint light beaconed through the black white drifts, vaguely flickered. Heart breaking steps drew the two men nearer to it. Almost blind eyes discerned the shadow of a log cabin.

A few minutes more. . . .

MOMENTS later they stumbled half dead into the glaring light in the shack. Moose Leg at last, thought the mountie. He numbly held his balance. Pierce yelled at a figure in front of him to keep that man covered. He had brought the killer back.

The warmth of the room seeped into his tired muscles and set the nerves tingling. He wiped the snow and frozen fog from his face to better see. And he swore softly.

Blued steel of a Winchester pointed mockingly at his face. And behind it blue eyes of a warm-lipped girl held him still. He laughed at the apparition. Too funny for anything. Then he shuddered as he recognized Janie McCreary.

He sprang for his gun. The blue eyes never wavered. But the Winchester barked and his revolver spun to the floor. The impact of the bullet swung the fatigued mountie around. The long blue steel barrel jabbed into his spine.

"There you are," yelled Casey, shaking Pierce by the shoulder. "First shot swung him around just like you and the second bullet went through his back."

Staggered up against the door, leaden arms upraised, the mountie shook his head stubbornly.

"Miracles don't happen like that," he said. "This don't prove nothin'. Yet," he was lost in his thoughts for a moment, "yet, maybe that's so."

Pat shrugged his shoulders. "It is," he said simply. "But we'll have to keep you safe for a spell till you *know* it's so."

He pulled Piece's arms behind him. In a moment his hands were tied. In another moment Janie had found the anklets and handcuffs and had the man chained in his own devices. He hardly felt the gripping steel through his fatigue.

Later when both men were tucked away for the night Janie sat on the edge of Pat's bunk. One hand was clasped in his.

"I knew you'd get down here," she was saying. "I thought you'd come here first and that's why I sent the cop where I did. I never thought you'd circle around." Pat tightened the arm he had around her waist and drew her head down to his. He kissed her gravely on the lips.

"Janie," he said softly. "I knew you'd be here and that's why I gave the mountie such a trip. Tough on him he didn't know the country better."

He smiled. This time Janie kissed him and patted him on the cheek.

"You're smart, Pat," she said. "An' that's one of the reasons why I like you. But guess why I love you best?" Her eyes twinkled.

"No. You tell me," he said.

"Because pretty soon we'll be Outside together. An' we won't have any mounties chasin' us. Or any gold strikes takin' you away. I brought lots of provisions out here for our grub stake, an' all the dust, an' my own team of dogs." Her voice rang with happiness and tenderness. She thrilled to the strong arm around her waist. She clung to Pat for a moment. Then, "Goodnight, Husky."

The next morning they cleared out early after making things as comfortable as possible for the mountie. They left

provisions and wood. But Pat hid Pierce's snowshoes in a clump of tamarack behind the cabin and left him manacled in his own anklets so he could not spread the alarm.

Just as they left Janie gave him a little poke of gold, much more than enough for the dogs they were taking. Then, impulsively, she stood on her toes, and kissed him again. Once on each reddening cheek. Light kisses that amazed and surprised him.

"By-by sleuth," she mocked. "We're both goin' west this time."

Pierce stood watching the two as they disappeared over a white rise in the trail. Suddenly he shook himself, chuckled softly to himself.

"Somehow," he said aloud, "I'm just as glad I didn't have to take him in. Rotten evidence against him—one slug to spin Stanhope around, one—why, Lord! They *must* be right. That boy Casey is white clean through, and the girl . . . Janie."

Pierce turned back to the cabin. "They'll be happy," he said, strangely content.

INDIAN CEREMONIES

THE American Indians, despite the influence of the white man, still hold to many of their old traditions and ways of doing things. The white men have taken away most of the Indians' lands but they will never be able to take away their traditions. For in many of their beautiful ceremonies are dramatized the culture, history, and religion of their race.

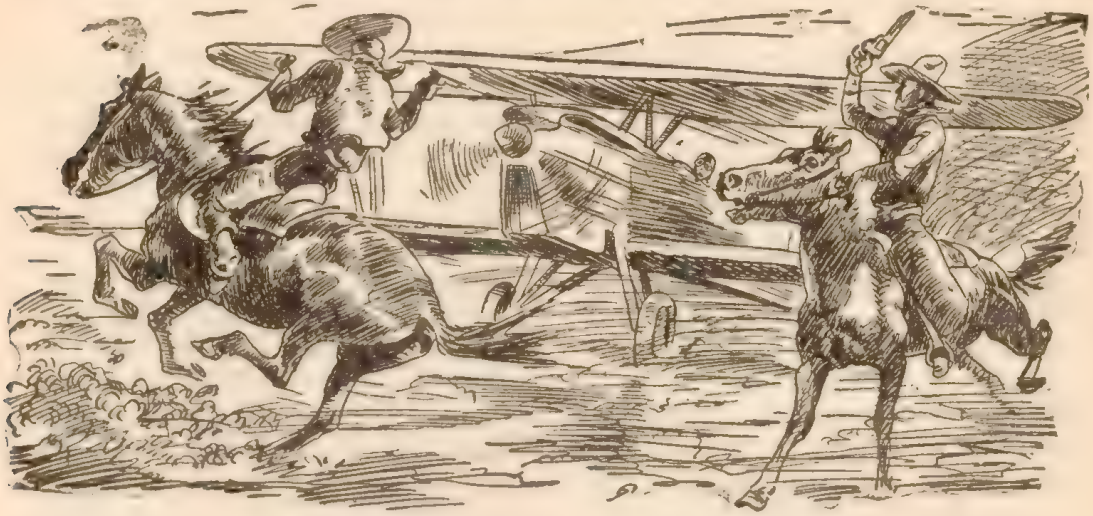
Nearly every autumn the Oklahoma Indians have a festival. In some ways it is similar to our Thanksgiving. It is in thanks to the Great Spirit for his bountifulness during the past year. If the crops look good towards the end of the summer the chief of the tribe sends out messengers to call his people together. Several days later, about the time the first green corn reaches the roasting-ear stage, all the villages of the tribe assemble and festivities begin.

The Indians dance and feast for three days. Herbs are soaked in a great pot and the chiefs and braves drink this magic beverage. Then, for three more days, they dance in a wide circle. At the same time the squaws and children sit in the middle of the dancing ring of men and fast. This completes the thanksgiving, and during the several days following, the whole tribe feasts and celebrates. But if the crops are bad, and a famine looks likely, the Indians do not offer any thanks to their God.

In its place many of the Indian tribes hold a different ceremony for the Great Spirit if he has shown his disapproval of their tribe by sending a plague or drought. This is their way of praying, giving penance, and asking forgiveness. Up in Saskatchewan recently there was a serious drought on the Indian Reserve. Fields were parched and cattle were suffering from lack of water. Chief Buffalo Bow decided to appeal to the Great Spirit. So he called his tribe together and for two days led a rain dance around a huge tree on which he had carved his request for aid. The Great Spirit answered them this time. Shortly after the ceremony the rain began and for two days it kept coming until the ground had soaked up sufficient water and the crops were saved.

Many white men laugh at these Indian dances or look upon them as they would a vaudeville show. But that is only because they do not realize that dancing is just the Indian's way of worshiping. As long as the red man can remember, and as far back as his history goes, dance and song have been his way of talking with the Great Spirit to thank him for his kindness or to ask him for forgivenness.

THE ELDORADO RAIN



By BRUCE DOUGLAS

GOLD FIELDS—Out of the sky came Ed Little's boy, Abilene, forking a tin buzzard, to show old Nugget Joe a new way to work his placer diggings. But the pan showed bullets when they washed the pay dirt.

I'M leanin' up against the bar, sluicin' my gullet sociable like with a stinkin' Greaser called Martinez, while he pumps me fer information I'm tryin' to fill him up with.

First and Last Chance Café this place is called. Which is a kind o' original humor, it bein' the only honkytonk in Oro. It's run by that pair o' polecats, Welch an' Kruger, who own the Red Streak Mine. They don't allow no other speakeasy in town; so's they can pay off their miners on Sat'd'y, fleece 'em all on Sunday, an' have 'em all back in the mine Monday. Martinez, as I well know, is sleuth, stool-pigeon, sneak thief, an' gunman fer Welch an' Kruger. An' I'm drinkin' with him jest to get him to pass on what I tell him to his two bosses.

I'm dressed up like a reg'lar cowpoke: bullhide chaps, Stetson, black sateen shirt, neckerchief, an' not forgettin' my old hawg-laig tied down on my right hip. I ain't been in them clo'es since me an' Eddie Rickenbacker, with some slight help from the Paris M. P.'s, licked the Kaiser. But around Oro nobody knows that, an' I pass all right fer a cowhand on a spree.

Martinez is pourin' more red-eye. I figgers it's time to find out if I've made any headway with my plot. I r'ars back on my heels an' eyes him cold like.

"What the heck, Greaser," I sneers at him. "Who yuh think yuh are to be drinkin' with a white man?"

I says this kind o' under my breath, but plenty loud enough fer him to hear. I don't want to force him to fight by lettin' ever'body in the saloon hear me insult him, but to give him plenty reason if he wants personal to throw his guns.

Martinez starts like a rattler'd struck at him. His face grows a dull red under the sallow Mex tan. His twitchin' hands, that never are still nohow, make a start fer gun butts; but he stops. Jest like I expected, he casts them beady eyes around to see if anybody's heard the insult. Then he forces out a laugh.

"Thee señor ees pleased to joke," he smiles, his eyes all the time lookin' like he'd give his right arm fer a chance to throw down on me. "We have been drinking all the afternoon together. But about thees gold strike of Señor Nugget Joe's— You were saying it was where?"

I clamps my jaws tight. "No, I wa'n't neither sayin' it was where," I growls. "What kind o' locoed fool yuh take me fer? Yuh think I hands out information like that fer nothin'?"

Martinez' face brightens. "Ah-hh!" he wheezes. "I begin to see. The señor is a man of sense. But, Señor—" He leans over toward me confidential like. "What if I know someone who might pay for such knowledge? *Si?*"

I shakes my head doubtful. Out o' the corner o' my eye, I sees Martinez slip a nod to the bartender. The next drink that comes up has got knockout drops o' some sort in it. I pretends to swaller it at a gulp, an' takes it down the back o' my shirt. Pretty soon I makes out that the drops is workin'. I get groggy, sprawl forward on the bar. Then Martinez motions a couple more plug-uglies, an' they carry me off. To the onlookers, it ain't nothin' but a cowpoke what took more'n he could stand up under bein' put away to sleep it off.

The greasers carry me up a flight of stairs an' lay me on a couch. Martinez goes off an' comes back with two hombres. An' I ketch myself jest afore I heave a sigh of relief.

It's Welch an' Kruger! The first part o' my plot has worked. But the hardest part is still in front of me—if I manage to get out of that den o' iniquity alive! Or in one piece!

I KEEPS my eyes nearly shut, an' breathes heavy like I'm drugged. But I manages to see right smart, an' hear everything.

Welch is a big strappin' feller, with black wavy hair, a hawk nose, an' black eyes set too close together. Kruger reminds me of a Heinie I forced down over Chateau Thierry—stocky, short, an' eyes like the belly of a dead fish. They sits down at a table, an' Martinez starts tellin' 'em everythin' I just got through fillin' him up with.

"This fool *vaquero,*" Martinez hisses, lettin' off all the steam against me that he's had to hold back so long, "this peeg, he say that Nugget Joe has struck it rich again!"

Welch lets out a grunt. "Struck it rich?" he exclaims. "Where?"

Martinez spreads out his hands. "That I do not know. I have bring heem to you. He only say that he have come across this Nugget Joe working gold at a stream. The *vaquero* say Nugget Joe knows not the worth of his claim. The old—what you say?—desert rat, he pan gold at the edge of the stream, while the *vaquero* walk over the land Nugget Joe has not yet tested and finds it rich. Ee-mensely rich! He say he find gold right up to thee grass roots!"

"Will he tell where Nugget Joe is?" Kruger demands.

I can see Martinez' hands twitching. "He suggest a sale," he admits. "But, Señores, I would be—I would be so—so *pleased* to extract the information from heem at the point of the knife! 'Greaser,' he call me!"

Welch clamps down on that idea. "Not unless we need to. Too dangerous. If he'll bargain, we'll buy. Pay him whatever he asks. Let him get clean out of Oro. Then, Martinez—"

The Greaser sobs with joy at the thought. "Then, Señor," he finishes Welch's sentence fer him," I follow, dispose of the so foolish *vaquero,* an' return the price to you!"

"Be sure yuh don't overlook that last," Welch snarls. But Kruger horns in.

"What yuh plannin' when yuh do find Nugget Joe?" he demands. "I tell yuh, Welch, we don't dast to rob him ag'in. We got his Red Streak mine, an' it's makin' us rich. But sentiment's pretty high against us. That old desert rat has never been known to tell a lie. An' when he tells around that we learned from

him how good his claim was, an' then went an' filed on it ahead o' him, people are sure to believe him. We dasn't rob him again. The public opinion might take the law into its own hands in these parts o' the country."

"Yeller!" Welch sneers. "Of course yo're afraid! Yuh yaller-bellied coyote, yo're afraid of yore own shadder! But—" he bites the end off a black cigar an' lights it—"What you afraid of? Ain't Martinez just told you there ain't no need o' robbin' Nugget Joe agin? If what this jasper says is true, Joe don't know he's got a good thing. He'll sell out fer a low price an' thank us in the bargain! Hell, we kin work it so's he'll agree to call off hard feelin' about the Red Streak—pay him more'n he thinks his claim is worth, an' tell him the price is tuh square us with him. That'll stop this public opinion yuh're afraid of."

"This jasper," Kruger repeats, pointin' at me. "Are you sure he's not awake? If he overheard . . ."

"Not a chance. He won't come out o' them drops for another quarter hour. Besides, when Martinez gits through with him, it won't matter what he's heard!"

THIS is valuable news to me, fer I didn't know jest when to be wakin' up. So I lies there thinkin' over how come I to be mixed up in all this.

I come acrost Nugget Joe while I'm on a job o' dustin' peas in Madre Santa Valley. Dustin' peas? It's a new way o' spreadin' sulphur on peas, used by the biggest valley ranches. Yuh fill up the tail o' yore plane with powdered sulphur, fly out over them mile-long ranches, an' cover the ranch with a series o' hedge-hoppin' swoops. Every time yuh come down, yuh let out a stream o' sulphur dust.

I been workin' a month on the big Los Felices Ranch, an' it's got plenty tiresome. Toward evenin' when I've dropped my last batch o' sulphur for the day, I turns her nose up an' hit fer the ceilin'. I throws her wide open, an' begins shadow boxing—jest playin' like I was in combat once more, with a couple of imaginary Boche planes tryin' to pick me off. I loops an' wheels an' wing-slips, and am havin' one hell of a good time, when all of a sudden in the midst of a loop I feels gasoline drippin' on my face!

I shuts off the motor to prevent an explosion, an' looks around. Here I am fifty miles east o' where I should be, over the Montes de Los Diablos, an' with a leaky gas line!

There's nothin' to do fer it but slide. Pretty soon I picks out a fairly level patch o' ground down in a narrow mountain valley with a stream on both sides. I finds out afterward it's a silt island in Diablo River. I hits fer that, comes down as sweet as yuh please into the canyon walls, makes a perfect three-point, an' taxies almost to the edge o' the stream. As I steps out o' my sky-bronc, Nugget Joe rises up right in front o' the plane. Another three feet, an' I'd of shoved him off into the river! He has a gold pan in his hand.

"WHAT yuh mean, young feller!" Nugget Joe hollers. "Git yore tin buzzard offen my diggin's!"

I don't pay no attention, but starts in lookin' fer the gas leak. Right off I finds it, and commences repairs.

"Pretty valuable diggin's, Joe?" I inquires.

Hearing his name, Nugget Joe looks me over careful. "Wal, I swan!" he exclaims. "If it ain't old Ed Little's boy, Abilene." Then his face falls at my question. "No, they ain't valuable diggin's, Abilene. They's practically wuthless. I gits a color in my pan; but that's about all." He heaves a sigh. "Once in a lifetime is about all a hombre can expect to strike it rich. I struck it that once, an' a couple stinking buzzards robbed me o' my claim!"

At that we gits to talkin', and I hears all about how Nugget Joe made his big strike, told Welch an' Kruger about it, an' got robbed. The trouble is, Nugget

Joe is jest too honest for the ordinary run of men. He's the salt o' the earth! He tells the truth an' acts honest, an' expects all other hombres to do the same. The ole coot makes a big strike at what is now the Red Streak Mine; but without even takin' the precaution to go to the county courthouse an' register his claim, he up an' tells these two curly wolves about it. They go an' register his claim, push Joe off, an' start piling up the fortune that by rights is Joe's.

As I hears this story, my blood begins to boil. I always did like Joe as good as anybody.

"Why don't yuh git back at them buzzards somehow, Joe?" I asks.

"How can I?" Joe quavers, his sun-bleached blue eyes lookin' straight at me like a baby's.

"Why"—I looks around—"mebbe yuh could sell 'em a wuthless claim, seein's how they stole yore good one."

Nugget Joe shakes his head. "It wouldn't be honest," he states.

But I presses the point. "But what if yuh could sell 'em this claim without lying to 'em?" I demands. I don't have no idea in my head how it could be done; but I wants an admission out o' Joe.

Finally Joe knuckles down. "Wal," he drawls, "if they was to beg me to sell it, even when I told 'em it was wuthless, I reckon it wouldn't be my business to prevent it. But yuh're talkin' foolishment. Nothin' like that could ever happen!"

"It could, too!" I snaps. I don't know why I says it, fer I hain't the slightest idea how it could be done; but my dander is up, an' I'm plumb determined to see that Joe gits back at them polecats Welch an' Kruger.

"How yuh goin' to bring it about?" Joe demands.

"Yuh leave that to me," I retorts.

"Wal," Joe says, doubtful like, "if they beg fer it, they can have it. But—" he looks at me sharp—"unnerstand, I won't have no slick monkey business. No saltin' this wuthless proppity, ner nuthing. An' I aims to tell 'em the hull truth about it if they asks me!"

I agrees to them conditions. The gas line is repaired; an' I takes off. When I leaves, I makes Joe promise to stake a claim on the whole island, reminds him that he's agreed to sell to Welch an' Kruger if they beg him to, an' swear that I'm going to make 'em beg. But it ain't till I've slept on the problem a night that I figgers out how I'm a-goin' to play Santa Claus to old Joe an' git him at least part of what is rightfully his.

IT'S about time fer me to be comin' out of that drug. I lets out a kind of groan, and my eyes flutter open.

"Where am I?" I mumbles.

Welch pours out a drink from a bottle of old Bourbon that's sittin' in front of him, and comes over to the couch.

"Drink this, cowboy," he says, screwing up his face in what he intends to be an engagin' smile. "Yuh drank a mite too much, and I had yuh brought here to my private office to sleep it off. Headache?"

I wriggles my head around on my neck and groans.

"Crimmeney, I must of been on one rip-roarin' twister to feel thisaway," I moans, gulping the Bourbon. Then I commences cussing a streak, like memory was comin' back to me.

"Jest to think," I sobs sorrowful, "to think that I let a lousy, stinking *mestizo,* a yaller cross between a Greaser and a half-breed Chinaman, drink me under the table!"

I'm eyin' Martinez sidewise as I says this. His nervous hands is twitching, and his black eyes is jest spittin' fire. But I knows he ain't to have his try at murdering me until later on; so I has my fun baiting him.

Welch casts an anxious glance at Martinez, and hops into the breach.

"Yuh're mistaken, friend," he says oily. "That Mexkin is pure Castilian. It ain't no shame to drink with him."

"Castilian!" I sneers. "The nearest

he'd ever come to Castilian would be a bar of Castile soap. And from the general odoriferousness o' that human polecat, I'd say him an' soap hain't been on speakin' terms fer years; mebbe never was interduced."

Martinez is simply wrigglin' all over with ambition to take a shot at me. His flutterin' hands drift down an' give little nervous pats to his twin gun-butts. Then they sidle up under his sash; an' I knows he's meditatin' heaving his toad-stabber at me. Welch is all excited fer fear Martinez'll bust out in spite o' orders, an' he'll have a dead cowpoke on his hands an' never will learn where this new gold strike of Nugget Joe's is. All together, I've stirred up a hornet's nest, an' I kin hardly hold back a grin.

FINALLY Welch settles the problem by ordering Martinez out of the room, an' him an Kruger edges up clost to me. I pretends to start with surprise when I sees Martinez go out.

"Heck, I didn't know that coyote was in hyer!" I exclaims. "I might o' started a mess o' trouble an' had to slay me one Greaser. Not that it'd a been no great loss to the human race—if Greasers is human."

Welch laughs short. "Yuh mistake him," he insists. "He's a real *caballero,* Martinez is. But anyhow, he's gone now. By the way, Mister—" he hitches his chair closter to where I'm sitting up on the couch—"mebbe you an' me can do a piece o' business."

"Business?" I raise an eyebrow.

"Yeah. Martinez says yuh was saying somethin' about a gold strike. . . ."

I looks ignorant. "A gold strike? I ain't made no gold strike. Hell, *compadre,* cain't yuh tell by my clo'es that I'm a cowpoke? I nuss cows fer a livin'; I don't go 'round diggin' holes in the ground."

Kruger cusses impatient, but Welch pipes him down with a wave of the hand.

"No, I don't mean that yuh been prospecting, but ain't yuh come acrost a prospector who jest made a strike?" Welch grins knowin' at me.

I lets a look o' slow understandin' flit over my map. "Oh! Yuh mean Nugget Joe!"

"Shore!" Welch warms up, now that he's makin' headway. "That's what I mean. What's this yuh been tellin' Martinez about Nugget Joe strikin' it rich?"

"I don't know what I been tellin' that Greaser while I'm in my likker," I snaps. "But right now I ain't tellin' nobody nothin'. Why fer should I tell you about old Joe's strike; an' what yuh want to know fer, anyhow?"

Welch puts on a look of cunning.

"I ain't sayin'," he whispers, meaning-like. "But Kruger an' me, we might make it worth yore while to tell where this strike is."

"Oh, yeah?" I tries to match cunning. "So the wind's in that direction, is it? But how am I to know that you'd play square with me? Yuh could right easy set them Mexkins o' yourn on me after yuh learnt what I know, git yore money back, an' have me silenced permament into the bargain!"

When I outlines his plan so complete, Welch can scarcely hold back a look of guilt. To cover it, he jumps up, holds out his hand, an' clenches it into a fist.

"I got them Mexkins right like that!" he states, givin' them strong fingers a twist like he was wringin' a prairie dog's neck. "Yuh don't need to worry none. I give yuh my word o' honor yuh'll carry yore pay safe home with yuh!"

"Then if I do git dry-gulched," I sneers, "I'll know yuh're behind it. All right. I'll take a chance But I got to have my pay in gold. Yuh own a gold mine, don't yuh? Yuh kin pay me in dust and nuggets right outen yore mine! Then there cain't be no marked bills or nothing!"

Welch looks sort of mad. "Suspicious critter, ain't yuh?" he grates. "All right. We'll pay yuh in dust. Yuh tell us where this strike o' Nugget Joe's is, an' we won't haggle about the price."

HE drags a big box out from under a table an' throws back th' lid. Th' box is full o' big sacks.

"These bags is full o' pure gold," he says, his greedy eyes lighting up as he looks at them. He hoists out a poke. "Yuh tell us where Nugget Joe is, an' this is yourn."

I clamps my jaws tight. "Jest the one," I sneers. "Ain't yuh the generous cuss! Yuh mean all o' them is mine! Why, yuh jaspers stand tuh make a million out of this! I tell yuh, I walked all over that claim o' Joe's, and there's gold right up to the grass roots! Furthermore, Joe ain't found that gold, and don't know how valuable the claim is. He's panning silt at the water's edge while there's chunks o' pure gold waiting to be picked up a few feet inland! Yuh can buy him out cheap—if yuh don't want to have him . . ." I draws my hand over my gullet an' makes a burbling noise.

Kruger gasps when I demand the hull box of gold; but Welch throws winks in his direction an' turns to me.

"All right," he agrees. "Yuh git the hull of it. Now where is Nugget Joe?"

But I'm wary. "When them pokes is in my saddlebags and them as won't go in is tied around my saddle," I declares, "an' when I'm in the saddle—then I'll tell yuh where Nugget Joe is. My hide is plumb watertight, feller, and I aims to keep it thataway. An' I don't trust yuh farther'n I can drag a shegrizzly with a tie-string."

Welch argues and argues; but finally he has to give in. Then the three of us sets to work and carries that gold downstairs and out to where I got my hawss hitched. He's a good *caballo* I've borried from my friend Ed Nelson, whose ranch is about four miles south, an' I count on him gettin' back home all right when I has to turn him loose.

Pretty soon the gold is in th' saddlebags, with some extra pokes tied on by their drawstrings. As I climbs on, I sees Martinez and three other Spics already mounted an' hiding out among some mesquite trees. Th' sun is settin', an' I figgers I'll have about another hour o' daylight. My mount has speed in him; and I'm all set for a runnin' fight when I gets started. I leans over.

"Nugget Joe," I says, "is in the Montes de los Diablos. He's staked his claim on an island in Diablo River. Yuh kin find it by headin' due west o' here, ridin' through Gunsight Notch, and follerin' the river about a mile downstream."

Welch still hangs on to my bridle. His face is threatening. "If that is true, cowpoke," he grates, "the trade is on. But if yuh're foolin' us to git this gold"—he snarls, an' his arm jerks angry at the bridle—"don't expect to live long! Yuh'll find this the most expensive gold yuh ever bought!"

"I'm tellin' yuh the truth!" I insists. "Mebbe I'll drop in on Nugget Joe when yuh're there with him, jest to show yuh that I'm playing square!"

Welch seems convinced, and lets go my bridle. I moves my six-gun up and down in the holster to make sure it ain't sticking, fer I'm expecting to need it soon.

"Remember," I jerks out, "if Martinez and those other Spics o' yourn foller me and start anythin', I'll know who sent 'em!"

With that, I lays spurs to my bronc, an' we sails out of Oro in a cloud o' dust.

I AIN'T in the least mistaken about needing to use my hawg-laig soon after I git out of Oro. Them four Spics show up on my trail only about half a mile out of town, and come a-running. Looks like they're so certain o' killin' me that they don't try to hide their intentions none.

I'd like to give 'em a run fer their money. This Martinez is a plumb ringy gunman. He's a two-gun bad man, an' I knows he must be a real killer er Welch an' Kruger wouldn't have him on their payroll. Still an' all, I hankers to swap lead with him; but I'm held back

in my intentions by that hawss. Nelson has done loaned me one of the best o' his string; an' I can tell when he hands him over that he thinks a heap of that pony. So I decides not to git in gunshot of them Spics if I can help it.

At that, we swaps a little lead, an' my Stet is ventilated about an inch above the scalp. But I makes a wide circle, ridin' fast, gets a little distance between us, an' rounds up alongside my sky-bronc which I've hidden out in the mesquite about a mile from Oro. I leaps off, transfers the gold to the tail end o' the plane, gives the hawss a slap on the rump to git him started back to his ranch, an' gits into the sky-buggy. An' I don't waste no time.

Just as I git going, Martinez an' them other three Spics come tearin' outen the brush, ridin' full tilt at the plane, an' sprayin' lead. I breathes a prayer that no bullets find the gas tank, an' gives her the gun. In a minute I'm in the air, wavin' sarcastic back at them Spics, who sit gawkin' up at me. I waggles my fins at 'em derisive, but I don't do no loops; an' soon they's mere specks on the ground.

HEADIN' straight back fer Nugget Joe's claim, I drops into the canyon jest afore full dark. Joe has a fire goin' so's I can see where to land. Afore I come down, I twists an' turns an' does didoes an' hedge hops all over that little island. It's too dark fer me to see Joe, but I knows he's down there, lookin' up at the flash o' my exhaust, an' prob'ly cussin' me out fer a locoed idjit fer stuntin' that low to the ground. But I knows what I'm doin'; an' pretty soon I brings my crate down on the level stretch to a easy landin'.

"Where yuh been, an' what yuh got on them cowboy clothes fer?" Joe demands when I climb out an' walk into the firelight.

"Yuh ever hear the story about the cat that pushed her nose into a cigar clipper?" I comes back. "She lost her nose 'cause she wasn't satisfied to stick to mouse holes like it was her business to. Supper ready?"

"Done et long since," old Joe snorts. "Beans in the pot, an' yuh kin heat the coffee up ag'in."

I squats down an' ladles me out a plate o' beans.

"Welch an' Kruger'll be over in the mornin' to look at yore claim," I announces. "Yuh got her staked out like yuh said yuh would?"

"Welch an' Kruger!" Joe exclaims. "Yeah, I staked her, though I don't see no sense in it. There ain't no pay gold on this island; an' they'll find it out soon's they look at it. 'Pears like a lot o' tarnation foolishment to me."

"Mebbeso, mebbeso," I grunts through a mouthful o' beans. "Anyhow, if they don't buy the claim, we've leastways got them two buzzards to take a long trip fer nothin'. That's somethin'."

I eats along in silence fer a while. Then Joe speaks up.

"Abilene," he quavers, "I been thinking. O' course, yuh ain't goin' to git them coyotes to offer nothin' fer this yere claim. But if they did, I swan I wouldn't sell nothin' to 'em fer less'n a hundred thousand dollars! By juniper, I'll tell 'em the claim is no good but that they can take it off my hands at a hundred thousand! Heh, heh, heh! It'll be good to watch their faces, anyhow!"

We starts crawlin' into our blankets.

"Yuh stick to that, old-timer," I replies. "Hold out fer a hundred thousand, an' make 'em do their own lookin' at the claim. Who knows? Mebbe they'll turn right aroun' an' give it to yuh."

"Yah. An' mebbe it'll rain tequila, an' the greasewood'll grow a crop o' pretzels!" Joe retorts. An' he goes to sleep chucklin'.

But I don't tell him nothin' about that Red Streak gold I've already separated them two polecats from.

IN the morning I starts in keeping close to old Joe. I dallies over breakfast, gittin' him tuh keep on makin'

more flapjacks until I'm like to bust. Then I fires a lot o' questions at him. Joe don't know what to make of it; an' I can see by them sun-faded blue eyes of his'n that he's hankerin' to get back to the stream and that gold pan. But, like I said, Joe is plumb the salt o' the earth. He considers me his friend; an' if a friend insists on making him kill time, Joe acts like a gent an' pretends to like it.

Presently I lights on the idear o' gitting Joe to show me how to pan gold; an' things go swimmin'ly. Nothin' a ole prospector likes better'n to show a tenderfoot how to use a pan. Looks like they're hooked fer life by the lure of gold; an' they take a regular delight in makin' a convert to the same disease. His old face lights up as he leads me down to the water, scoops up some mud, and starts in.

Still and all, I'm heavin' a sigh of relief when Welch an' Kruger an' that Spic Martinez come in sight. I been looking upstream till I got a crick in my neck. I counts on them losing no time gettin' to Joe; but I knows if my hunch is wrong an' they wait a day or two, all my plans is gone haywire. But here they comes, over to where Joe an' me is leaning over the gold pan.

Welch takes the lead as usual, smiling so friendly his face is like to crack. He looks surprised to see me, but he covers it up quick.

"Howdy, Old-timer," he hails Joe.

Joe r'ars back on his heels without gitting up and grunts. Me, I gits up an' stands clear where I can have an even break if Martinez goes for his hawglaigs.

"I hear yuh got a good claim staked out," Welch goes on. "Me and Kruger come over to congratulate yuh. If it's a really good claim, we might buy you out. Yuh don't want to run no mine. Yuh can put yore money in the bank an' live easy the rest of yore life."

Joe gits to his feet. His faded blue eyes is snapping.

"I don't want nothing to do with you two buzzards!" he snaps. "I got enough grief from yuh already! I tell yuh right out, this claim is no good. Hardly wuth driven' stakes on. But if yuh two polecats wants to buy anythin' from me, if it was only a cast-off pair of sox, the price is a hundred thousand dollars! Now I ain't got time to waste on cattle o' yore stripe. If yuh want to look over the claim, look till yore eyes ache. I'm busy pannin'."

He turns his back on them an' squats down over his pan. Then I horns in.

"Yuh go right ahead an' pan, Joe," I says. "I'll show the gentlemen over the claim."

"Do as yuh danged please!" Joe growls.

ME and Welch and Kruger draws aside.

"What the hell yuh doing here?" Welch demands, suspicious, soon's we're out of earshot o' Joe.

I looks surprised and injured.

"Why, ain't I helpin' yuh?" I snaps. "It's a good thing yuh got here when yuh did. I'm 'bout at my wits' ends keeping old Joe down by the water and away from the claim. Any minute he's liable to find out how rich it is!"

Welch still looks suspicious, though not so much so.

"I know," I goes on. "Yuh don't expect much good-will from me after setting yore Mexkins on me last night. But I sold yuh something, an' I aim to see that yuh git it."

"Me set Mexkins on yuh!" Welch pretends supprise. "I didn't set no Mexkins on yuh! Yuh mean to say them boys tried to hold yuh up?" He turns toward Martinez, but I stop him.

"Nemmine," I says. "I handled the little affair. An' mebbe yuh wasn't involved in it. That was a right smart o' gold I was carrying away. But jest yuh look this island over! It's solid gold right down to the bottom!"

Welch's eye ketches a glint. He stoops down an' picks up a nugget. He gasps. Kruger leans over an' gathers in two.

Then they looks excited like back at Nugget Joe. But Joe is bending over his pan like nobody was within miles o' his claim.

There ain't no more talk. Them two jaspers gets busy, circulating all over that island. They picks up nuggets. They runs sand through their hands, an' there's so much gold dust left that their hands is yeller!

Pretty soon a crafty look of suspicion comes into Welch's eyes.

"Joe!" he yells back at the ole prospector. "Yuh sure this claim ain't salted?"

With a speed that's surprising in a hombre of his age, Nugget Joe jumps up an' runs over to his duffle. He yanks out an old Sharps rifle, an' when he turns around his eyes is blazin'.

"Salted!" he hollers, his voice runnin' up to a squeak. "Salted! Why, yuh rattle-hocked, wind-broke, spavined, locoed cross between a polecat and a yaller-bellied coyote! Did yuh ever hear of Nugget Joe pullin' anything that was crooked? Yuh think all hombres is as pizen crooked as you two buzzards is! If there's any gold on that land, it comes there natural! Now yuh jaspers git offen my claim, an' git quick, afore yuh stink up the land like a passel o' sheep!"

Welch quick becomes conciliatin'. He's plumb convinced; because old Joe always tells the truth. Joe is the salt o' the earth, and everybody knows it.

"Aw, take a joke!" he comes back. "No use yuh going off yore string thataway, Old-timer. I didn't mean nothing by it. Besides"—the crafty look come into his eyes again—"there ain't enough gold on this claim to look like salting. Jest a tetch here an' there. Still, jest to win yore favor, we might buy it of you. Yuh been thinking some mighty mean things about Kruger an' me, Joe; and it hurts us mighty. We aim to make friends."

Joe sits down right where he is, still keeping that ole rifle trained.

"I done told you I wouldn't sell yuh nothin' fer less'n a hundred thousand. An' yuh know plenty well this claim ain't wuth that! Why'n't yuh git away from here an' leave me alone?"

Kruger an' Welch starts whisperin' together.

"But it's wuth a million!" I hears Welch exclaim. "I say give it to him! Any minute he's likely to look this land over an' see what he's got here!"

Finally Kruger consents, an' Welch turns back to Joe.

"JOE," he whines, sort o' ingratiatin', "yuh know, and we know, that this claim ain't wuth no hundred thousand. But Kruger an' me has had a talk. Mebbe yuh got a right to feel some hurt about the Red Streak, though the mine belongs to us all fair and legal. Anyhow, we don't want yuh to think us two honest men is crooked. So jest fer good-will, we'll give you a hundred thousand for this claim!"

Joe's eyes goggle out, but he keeps th' rifle trained. "Yuh mean yuh're beggin' me tuh sell?" he demands. "Are yuh beggin'?"

"Well, ef yuh want tuh put it that way," Welch answers. "Will yuh take a hundred thousand fer it?"

"Yes!" Joe yips. "It ain't wuth it, and I'm tellin' yuh it ain't. But you jaspers owe me more'n a hundred thousand. If yuh're fool enough to buy my claim fer that, I'll not stop you!"

Welch pulls out a checkbook. I'm about to object to a check, when I thinks better of it an' says nothing.

Welch writes a check, an' scribbles out a transfer o' claim on a piece o' paper. I takes 'em over to Joe, fer he still don't hanker to come near either of them buzzards. Joe signs the transfer, and pockets the check.

"Th' claim is yores," he says. "I'll be moseyin' over to Clavers an' register my claim, so's yuh can register the transfer."

"What!" Welch gasps. "It ain't registered?"

Then all hell busts loose.

I sees what's comin', an' goes fer my hawg-laig. Turning loose of a hundred thousand dollars when there's a chance to steal it like he stole Joe's other claim is jest too much fer that mizerly Welch. He's made signs to Martinez, and all three jaspers is plumb intent on shooting us both down! Dead men tell no tales, they say, an' they aims to kill us, bury the bodies somewhereabouts, an' file on this claim like they jest found it.

I pops a shot at Martinez, who's unlimberin' both his hawg-laigs, but misses. But Nugget Joe lets out a war-whoop, an' say! That old-timer gets into action with his old Sharps; an' what I mean is action! In no time at all he has those three coyotes holed up behind whatever shelter they can find.

"Hold 'em there, Old-timer," I hollers, running fer the plane.

I gits the engine started.

"Come a-running," I bawls, over the noise of the engine.

Old Joe comes. He ain't never been up in a plane; he hesitates a second, and I see he's a little white around the gills; but he climbs aboard. I gives her the gun and we're off.

WELL, that's about all of that. We flies straight to Clavers, records the claim, an' cashes the check. We not only cashes the check afore Welch can stop payment on it; we takes a cashier's check fer the amount, goes acrost the street, and opens an account in the other bank!

After that's all done an' Joe's hundred thousand is safe, I remembers that I'm a day overdue in Madre Santa Valley. The Los Felices ranch is liable to think it's lost itself one aviator.

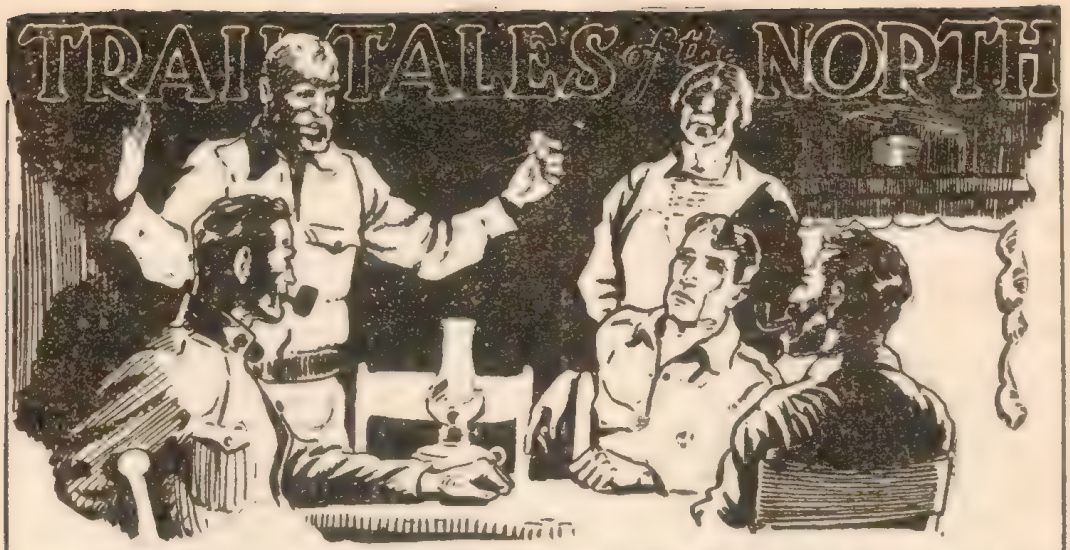
And a good one at that!

So I takes off. Nugget Joe, he tries to make me accept half o' his hundred thousand; but I won't hear of it. I leaves him gitting ready to go on a big spree, an' already talking of some hills where he's plumb sure there's a big strike to be found.

Oh, the gold I got from Welch an' Kruger? Well, that's my secret. But some folks that eats peas from the Los Felices ranch this year is liable to git gold-plated teeth. 'Cause specks o' that gold was still in the sifter when I dumps in my sulphur and goes back to dusting peas!

K. O. FOR COYOTE

CARL SPERLING meant to shoot jackrabbits. A full-grown coyote mistook his intentions, became furious at Farmer Sperling, supposing that he was hunting coyotes, and leapt at him from the rear. Sperling whirled, fired, and missed. Dropping his rifle, he grappled with the beast hand to hand. He managed to get a firm grip around its neck, and fifteen minutes or so later, Vale, Oregon, was minus another coyote. Farmer Sperling was minus a shirt, torn from his back in the struggle. No further casualties.



In each issue of NORTH•WEST STORIES you will find a trail tale of the North Country—true, gripping experiences of men and women who have blazed new trails and old on the great Northern frontier. This story is told by a man who has been there and seen.

More Than Courage

By BOB ELSWORTH

I WAS just settling down comfortably back of the counter to read a magazine that Anse LeTrain left at the Post on his way up to Moose River. I'd hardly got a chance to get a good look at the pretty girl on the cover when old "Rabbit Skin" Moreau stomped in out of the snow. He was still limping some. He hadn't quite learned to work that peg leg he'd acquired the winter before. He didn't care much about that, though. Fact is, he liked people to see him waddling down the street. That leg was a sort of badge for him. A medal of friendship, and courage, and faith.

His fuzzy beard, half hidden in a beaver skin cap, poked into the store ahead of him. The boys here say it was those fuzzy whiskers that gave him the name "Rabbit Skin." They used to suggest that he cut them off for a pelt, skin and all, and sell it. "Wuth about two bits, tanned right," Cougar Norris said once. But none of us made any cracks like that again for old Fuzzy Face piled into Cougar and handed him a licking the like of which he never expected and didn't intend asking for again. But that's aside from the story.

This day, Rabbit Skin came wabbling into the "Trapper's and Trader's" dressed for the coldest winter weather. He pulled off his fur cap and heavy parka and threw them down on a case of canned beans.

"What'll you give me for these?" he said in his thin, rasping voice. "Trappin' ain't been so good this here season."

"Dunno," I said, looking straight into his twinkling eyes. "Business ain't been so hot here neither."

He chuckled under his rabbit-hide beard. We always did like that joke. "I suppose you got me a whole bag o' mail, ain't you?" he asked, peering through the window grating with a mock eagerness that was only half acted.

"Got a letter for you," I said.

"What?" You see, this wasn't the way the game usually went.

"Yep," I said. "From Boston. Came the other day." I went over behind the counter and fished out the envelopes. "Mr. R. S. Moreau, Windy Pitch, Maine," I read. "That's you, ain't it?"

The old trapper snatched the letter

out of my fingers as if it were gold I was stealing from him. He looked at it thoughtfully for a moment, his old crinkled face beaming with joy. Then he ran his fingers over the writing on the envelope, like a blind man reading Braille. He glanced up, suspicion in his eyes.

"Ain't kiddin' me?" he asked belligerently.

I shook my head. He opened the letter cautiously, pulled out the folded paper, and passed it to me tenderly, as if it were his choicest treasure. "Read it," he said. "My eyes ain't so good these days. Can't figure out the scrawls."

Moreau was that way. He wouldn't admit he couldn't read. He never owned up to anything he couldn't do. He was that kind of fellow.

"Dear old R. S." the letter ran. "Be up to see you soon. Going to bring a pal this time. A lady. I married her. She's the one I told you about. We're coming up to Windy Pitch for our honeymoon. Be there in two-three days. You'd better get a section of lead pipe for that johnny cake of yours. We're going to stay with you as long as we can. Behave."

A strong, solid, signature was spread across the bottom. "Jake." Then there was a P. S. "Mrs. James Archibald Barrett sends her love. She's Lisbeth."

THE old man smiled wistfully as I finished the letter. He took the paper and tucked it carefully away in a breast pocket of his wool shirt. Then he patted his chest where it lay.

"She's Lisbeth," he said, wrinkling up his forehead. His bony hand was rubbing his stubbly white whiskers.

"You know," he began. Then he looked up at me queerly. "No, you wouldn't know," he said decisively. "You're just a hard-boiled young squirt who gyps everybody six ways on their hides. Nope." He played with his beard for a moment.

Then cautiously he started in again. "Maybe you would, though," he said. "Maybe you got a soul just the same."

Funny talk, I thought, coming from a trail-toughened old-timer. Guess the chinook was melting him down at last, softening him like it did to the snow in the one crooked street of Windy Pitch.

"Sure," I said. "O' course I got a soul."

"Well," he hesitated. "You know this Jake, don't you?" And he patted the pocket where the letter was. "He's just like a son to me, that boy. Just like my *favorite* son, which I haven't a real one. I'm glad he's got married. He'll he happy with Lisbeth. She must be one fine girl for him to like her."

"Naturally," I said. I knew, now, what he was leading up to. I'd heard the yarn before. But the way old Moreau lived it again each time, I was always ready to listen.

"Funny thing about people," he said, settling himself down near the low-burning stove. "You know when Jake first come up to Windy Pitch, I near died just to look at him. Thought I'd be feeding him out of a bottle before winter. Thought maybe I'd have to git him some diapers." He stopped for a minute. He took out an old pipe from his corduroys. Lit it. Pulled in on it thoughtfully.

The rest of us had thought just about the same thing. James Archibald Barrett was not the north woods' style of man. From Back Bay Boston's bluest blood, he was. Had just graduated from Harvard. Or rather, had just been kicked out at the end of his last year there. A doctor had sent him up to Windy Pitch, he said. Told him to go up in the woods and "smell some pine trees for a while."

I remember when he dragged into town. Pale, thin, tall, looking as though he'd clean fell apart from being shook up in the old Reo we used as a stage. He had plenty of money, though, and old Rabbit Skin had offered to "guide" him around the country for a few months.

Yes, he did look as though he could stand some sanitary feeding. And as the

summer rolled on he looked as if he needed more than that. A sanitary coffin. But he hung on, and somehow his bony body hung together. And then . . . Well, how could we guess?

MOREAU blew a couple of smoke rings and went on with his yarn. "Funny thing about Jake," he said softly. "When fall come I was plumb lost as to what to do with him. He still acted plenty soft, though his muscles had hardened up some. But he was always moody-like and lonely, as if there was something on his mind. I was all for writing to his nurse and telling her to come up and get him.

"But you know what happened. He said to me one day, 'Rabbit Skin, I'm going to stay the winter.'

"What could I do? There he was. So I told him it snowed twenty feet deep and the wolves got hungry and ate tall, skinny youngsters from Boston. He just smiled. And there we were.

"Well, you know what happened. He stuck around and stuck, and stayed for the fall hunting. I shot a moose for him one day and he thought he did it, and that made him want to stick some more. Then the season come around and I had to go out on my trap-line. For a spell, Jake just moped around the cabin alone. Then one day he said he wanted to run himself a line.

"It took him some time to get used to the snow shoes. He never got much good at it. Didn't like the bearpaws, anyhow. Said he preferred the long cruisers. So when he got so he could go a couple of miles without stepping all over his own feet and taking a header into a drift I mapped him out a little trap-line running up Sloppy Creek to the Muskillicook. And first thing I knew he come in with a couple of beaver and four-five muskrat. Proud? Why, he was just like you was the time you accidentally shot that moose up to Crown River. I've often thought it was just what he needed, that trapping job. Gave him something all his own to work on all by himself—once he got started at it.

"Well, the winter kept piling in on us. Then we had that big snow. Drifted way up over my little shack. We had to dig our way out of a morning. Dig back in of an evening, too, after a hard day on the trap-lines. Kept on snowing, and got worse. We didn't either of us do any trapping a couple of days there. Just set around playing with some checkers he whittled out of a stick. And he beat me too, every time. At checkers, I was like him on snow shoes. Never could work the little jiggers much good.

"About the third day he got restless and says to me, 'Old Woolly Face,'—he called me that sometimes. 'Old Woolly Face, I'm going out to my traps. I think maybe I've caught me a couple dozen silver fox.'

"Of course I just laughed at him. But then he wrapped himself up and went out. What could I do? I couldn't let that city softie show me up at my own business, so I hit the line too.

"THAT was one bad day. Remember? The wind was hooting down the valley something fierce. Cold and bitter, and sometimes mixed up with a little sand snow. None of the animals was out. They'd all dug in for the storm, and I didn't get much of anything. Up at the fork of Sick Squaw Brook and Debsecong River I found a nice little marten. I skun him right there and hung him in a tree till I was coming by there on the way back. The trail ran up Sick Squaw, and I followed it.

"About four mile up, the snow was so deep and drifted I couldn't see the creek no longer. Only way you could tell it was there was because the trees didn't grow in it. Then I come across the dead water. It looked sort of treacherous—all white and gleaming, with the wind howling over it. But the snow was deep enough.

"So I headed direct across it for a bear trap I'd set on the other side. It

was a big thing, with double springs on each side, and riveted teeth. Got it hung over the fireplace in the cabin. You can see it some day when you're by.

"But I couldn't find it anywhere, that day. I'd set it in a little hole near the dead water and covered it with leaves. The sign I'd put up was blowed over and buried in the snow.

"Then I took off my snow shoes and took to digging around for the sign. Didn't want no strangers wandering into the trap. Pretty soon I found it in about three feet of snow, tripped over it, sort of, and fell down. I got up to my feet and was stomping the snow off me when suddenly I heard a swishing sound beside me and a *crack,* and I felt numb all over.

"Then I fell down in the snow again. I didn't really know what had happened yet, but my leg commenced feeling like a hunk of boiling lead. Then I knew. I'd stepped into my own bear trap.

"Well, to make it short. The steel teeth cut into the bone just above my ankle, bit clean through one o' them oil-tanned cruiser moccasins, and on through the flesh. It bled bad for a while, but the blood froze up. There I was.

"I reached in my pocket for the clamp to open the double spring trap, and it wasn't there! I don't know what I could have done with it. Oh, yes; it was in that little pack I carry on the line. And I'd taken the pack off so I could dig better. I tried to reach it, but it was too far away.

"Then I began hunting for my knife. Thought of cutting off my own leg, if need be. I'd soon freeze to death there in the trap, and I figured my leg wasn't much use now anyway. Funny how I was thinking o' that quite calm-like. I reached for the sheath, and the knife was gone! I had it a second ago, I remembered, when I skun the marten. I looked all around the hollow. Yes, there it was, just the dark handle sticking out of the snow over where I'd stumbled.

"I tried to drag myself over toward it. The steel clamps tightened into my leg. The trap hung back heavily, but it slid along some till the chain pulled tight. I stretched out as far as I could. The knife glittered, as if mocking me, just out of reach.

"All of a sudden I was sick again, and I sprawled out full length in the snow. Guess I must have passed out cold that time, for it was dark when I woke up, and the snow was falling."

For a couple of moments old Rabbit Skin puffed on his pipe. He was slightly startled to discover it was out. He shook his head dolefully, heaved a big windy sigh.

"Not much good, this tobacco," he said. He shook out the bowl, stuffed a fresh charge into the battered briar and lit up

"WELL, to git along with the story," he began again, "I thought I was pretty well finished. My leg didn't hurt no more where the trap had me. It just felt kind of heavy. But up near my knee it was burning and flaming and shooting pains all through me. You know how it is when part of you is froze.

"The wind was blowing too, shrieking down through the spruce trees. And the snow was beating down, hard and sandy, and flying into you like bird shot. Funny, the things I was thinking. Like, how it wouldn't be nice to be out in this kind of weather, and wasn't it lucky I was sitting home with the fire crackling over there in the stove.

"Guess I must have been daffy. Every so often I tried to move around and keep warm. But pretty soon I had to give that up. I was weaker than a pork'-pine, and the pains in my leg climbed up to my heart and doubled me up. Then I tried to pile snow over me. I remember I began to feel warm in a funny prickly way.

"I found myself thinking of that poor fellow back in the cabin. What would James Archibald do for supper? Me

away not to cook it. He sure was a soft guy, I thought. Turned his stummick to skin a rabbit. Fine gent in his own way, though. Maybe he'd be lonely tonight, and scared of the wolves, without me there to play checkers with him. Crazy thing like that. And I remembered when I was a kid living on the Saco River, and how I trapped a muskrat once and felt sorry for the little furry animal getting hurt, but glad I'd got my first pelt.

"Right in the middle o' that I thought I saw a light shining in my face. I closed my eyes because it hurt. Figured sure enough it was the golden sidewalks in Heaven glinting because the sun was so close to them. Somebody said something to me, then, and reached down to brush the snow off my face and shoulders.

"The light went off my face a while. I heard a sound like a sudden moaning gasp. Something was feeling around my hurt leg. It took me three, four minfour minutes to realize what was happening. Sure enough, I wasn't dead at all. Still living there in the cold snow. My trapped leg felt funny, and I was sort of warm and numb all over.

"A voice came to me out of the snow drifting down. 'It's me,' it said. 'It's me, Barrett.' It was steady and soft, that voice. 'Wake up,' it said.

"The light snapped off my face and I opened my eyes. It was shining now on the face that had the voice. I squinted, not believing I was doing anything but deaming. Yes, I thought. I guess I am alive after all.

" 'Barrett?' I said.

" 'Yes,' he said, kind of assuring-like. 'Where's your trap clamps?'

"So I told him they were in the pack, and the pack was over there. I tried to tell him what had happened, but he was gone. The light flickered back on me and I saw Jake leaning over the trap. Soon he had it open, though I didn't feel anything down there at all. My leg was still heavy and burning.

"Then he said, 'Okay, Woolly Face. We're going home, now. I knew there was something wrong when you didn't come home to fix supper. Been following your trap-line ever since.'

"He made a sling for me out of a rawhide thong, with a tump line to run over his head. Then he strapped me up like we'd done with duffel on canoe portages in the summer. And he slung me up on his back, slow and careful.

"I DON'T remember much after that. Once, I know, he tripped in a sink in the dead water. One of them places where the gas comes up all winter and the ice stays thin. Guess he must have fallen in. I heard the water splashing.

"I came to another time when he was ploughing through the soft snow in the spruce thickets down the Sick Squaw. Lucky thing he had those long cruiser snow shoes. Bear paws wouldn't be any use that night.

"Down the Debsecong the wind was blowing something awful. I could see Jake leaning into it, and the snow was drifting in between me and him, making a little pile on his back. Sometimes he would fall down and lay there for a second. Then he would heave up again, and next I'd know he'd be down again. He lugged me nigh onto eight miles.

"First thing I knew real clear I was awake in the cabin. My leg had a sheet wound around it and looked terrible and big. Below the knee there wasn't any pain. But above it, there was a throbbing like ten guys were hitting it with cord wood. And red hot jabs run up and down my stomach to my heart. My fingers were jumping and jerking. Down my back I felt as if there was burning tar.

"THEN he came in. Barrett, I mean. The door fell open and he tumbled in on the floor, both his hands clutching what looked like a big bundle of fur. Jake stood up, took a header onto his bunk and lay there breathing hard. Meanwhile, the furry thing got up off the floor. It was Doc

Wilde. You know Doc. He comes from over Dagget's Mills way. Jake had gone all the way into there to get him. Near ten mile, I guess, from our place, round trip.

"Doc growled something I didn't understand. Then Jake got off his bunk and sort of pulled himself together. The two of them talked to each other. Guess they thought I was asleep, because Jake got out his skinning knife and started to whet it on a stone. He looked over at me a couple of times. I guessed what they were going to do and let out a shriek. Jake jumped over and sat on me. But I fought with him, and he said, 'Sorry, old Woolly,' He must have smashed me in the jaw then, because I don't remember nothing for a long time.

"You know, now, what Jake done for me. Everyone says that blizzard we had the night of February third was the worst in nigh onto twenty year. Folks said only luck and old Doc's skill brought either of us through alive. But they were wrong. It was guts and fight, like no man living but Jake has, that did it.

"You see, he pulled into Doc's house about dead. Sally, that's Doc's daughter, had to give him near half a pint of whiskey before he could talk. When he'd hardly got warmed up he said to Doc, 'You're coming with me, Wilde. Moreau, over at Windy Pitch, is dying. You gotta save his life.' Just like that —simple-like.

"Guess he was too done in to explain what had happened. Anyhow, as Doc told it to me afterward—and he's been kinda ashamed of it ever since—Doc says, 'Like Hell, I'm going out with you! If we leave here there'll be three of us laid out instead of one. Besides, he'll live till morning.'

"Jake stands up, firm. He says to the girl, 'You, Sally, you go in the next room. You won't like what's going to happen.'

"But she didn't move away. Just stood there, white, like, and pale.

"Jake whirls on the doc. 'Last chance,' he snaps. 'Coming?'

"'No sir,' declares Wilde. And Jake tied into him. There was quite some scrap, according to the girl's story. Quite a battle. A table was smashed, and Sally got hit so hard by mistake that she's got a scar on her forehead to this day. Lucky for me Jake was made of real stuff down underneath. It was those fighting guts he had that none of us knowed anything about that won.

"Pretty soon he had the girl fetch Doc's bag and his coat. He put them on the old boy, and just plain dragged him out the door. Doc was willing to come all right when the realized how bad I was hurt, but Jake hung onto him just the same. Guess he must have half dragged Wilde all the way. He was still hauling on him when they fell in the door, like I told you.

"WELL, to make it short, when I woke up next there was already an order in for this-here wooden leg I got. From my knee down, my leg had been smashed and froze. Doc hacked it off with the hunting-knife, and finished the bone with that old wood-saw we got hanging over the fireplace now.

"Over in the other bunk, Jake was saying something I couldn't understand. And the Doc's gal, Sally, was flitting about the place in a white dress. Jake had some frozen parts and a terrible fever. Doc said he thought once he was going to have to plant both of us for the long sleep. He says Sally really brought us both through alive. She wouldn't leave us hardly a second.

"For a long time neither of us could get up. I was in the bunk near the fire, and he was over on the other side. Sally would sit between us, sewing on things and patching up our clothes for us. We'd play checkers, each with our own board telling the other fellow what to do. And he told me some o' them things I figured he had on his mind.

"He said his old man had really kicked him out of the house. Said he was a bum and a waster down to Boston. He hadn't been sent up here for his health

like he told us first. He'd come because he couldn't think of any other place to go. Sort of hoped maybe he'd get lost in the woods or drown or something. But daggone it, the joke was on him. He got the wrong partner. 'You just couldn't go out and die with old Woolly Face on your neck all day,' he used to say.

"Besides he was glad he hadn't kicked out. Had a girl in Boston and he reckoned she'd be glad to see him again now that he was good for something, even if it was only running a trap-line. Then I'd tell him he could do anything, now that he'd got his think-tank straightened out, and if he said different, why dang it, I'd climb right outa bed and rap this peg leg around his thick head.

"SO he went back down to Boston last fall. Wrote me some letters since then."

Rabbit Skin patted his breast pocket. His pipe was out again, so he tucked it away. He shook his head, thinking of Jake, and smiled up at me a little wistfully again. "Guess Lisbeth was waiting for him, all right," he said. He tapped his peg leg against the floor a couple of times, then stood up. On his way out he picked up his fur cap and coat, and slung them across his shoulder. It was too warm to wear them.

"So long," he said. "I'll be back in a couple of days with some pelts. Got some fine ones."

At the doorway he stopped, his hand holding the door open, letting the soft warm wind blow through the store. His free hand was playing with his woolly beard.

"Just shows," he said seriously. "You can't never tell what a fellow's got in him till he gets a real chance. Jake, for instance. Fine lad. Like a son to me."

Then he was gone, stumping along down the street. He looked a little tired and lonely walking along in the slush that way.

TO JAIL WE'LL MERRILY TREK

POINT HOPE, ALASKA, has ordered a larger, more luxurious jail. It's the most popular building in town, as far as the Eskimos are concerned. The trading schooner *C. S. Holmes*, commanded by Captain John Backland, left for the north carrying the new jail. It seems that United States Marshal Bert Meril of Point Hope threw a couple of the natives into the jug for some minor law violation. They were so well fed and the jail was kept so warm that they spred the happy news all over Point Hope. The result was that the natives took to breaking every law they could lay their hands on in the hopes of being incarcerated for the winter. Hence the order for a bigger and better hoosegow.

CALL OF THE NORTH

By GERARD PREVIN MEYER

WHEN the day is growing dusky
Then I holler to my husky
And I start my sled upon the long mush back.
Through the dark, and driftin' snow
'Tis a long, long way to go
Till at last I stop my dog-team at my shack.

When I've got a roarin' fire,
An' my clothes an' things are dryer,
Then I sit before the comfort of the blaze,
An' my thoughts all sort of roam
Till they somehow come to Home,
An' I realize the error of my ways.

For it's up here in the North
That we see what home is worth
While a drivin' snowstorm howls outside the door.
Yep, it's sourdoughs that know
When it's forty-six below
An' the cold an' all just hits us to the core.

We could go back to the States;
But we hate to leave our mates,
An' the snow just somehow creeps into our blood.
You would know our reasons, too,
If you'd paddled light canoe,
If you'd tried the angry frothing of the flood.

If you'd breasted raging blizzard
When the wind would freeze your gizzard
An' the snow was swirling in a crazy reel;
If your dog-team'd broke its trace
An' you'd fallen on your face
In the cold, you'd know a little how we feel.

Oh! It takes a solid hold!
Call it fish or furs or gold,
It's the North that really keeps us where we are.
An' as long as red blood fills us
We'll be up here, if it kills us,
In the stormy stretch beneath the Northern Star.

When Good Fellows
Get Together
This is the get-together corner for our readers. If you are searching for a pal or you are letter-hungry, or if you are seeking an opportunity, address your fellow readers through this department. There's no charge, these pages are free to all.

AN old friend of ours made the Long Traverse the other day. Cap Lane was your friend too even though you may have never even heard of him. For he was a pioneer of the finest kind, an adventurer in spirit and in deed.

Before the Civil War, when he was still only a youngster, he found that life on his father's farm in Maine was not romantic enough for him. So he hunted for work as sailor on a small packet boat plying up and down one of Maine's largest lakes. It was a wild country up there in those days and adventures came almost as regularly as his meals.

Then the war broke out and he went south to fight in the navy. This was really the first time he had been out of his native state. He was astounded by the size of the world, thrilled by the sea and the ships and the men, and that wanderlust that stuck to him to the end of his days got into his bones for good, then and there. At the end of the war he came back to his old job on the lakes, but found it a bit dull after his recent experiences.

About eighteen seventy-five—he himself wasn't sure just when—he hiked down to Boston, signed on one of the clipper ships. But on the first voyage out the beautiful boat foundered off Cape Hatteras, and there Cap was down on the Virginia shores, destitute. He had heard of New Orleans, its color and gaiety, and the grandeur of the Mississippi River. So with only a pair of canvas pants, some shoes and an old shirt for possessions, he hiked cross country. Down in New Orleans he secured a mate's berth on one of the high-funneled side wheelers that, at that time, were the only good communication up "Old Man River."

He stuck it out for a long time on the Mississippi, became captain and part owner of one of the gaudiest, fastest, and most famous of the picturesque river boats. He loved the great muddy stream, the colorful boats, and the grand gentlemen and ladies who were his passengers.

But the river trade began to give out. Railroads cut into the country and opened up the Mississippi Valley and Middle West, made them as civilized as the East coast. Sidewheelers were no longer the main form of transportation. Trains would go faster and packet boats were being made into coal barges. Cap was thinking of quitting and going back to settle down for his old age on his farm.

Then someone struck gold in Alaska and the '98 rush was on. Cap acquired the fever too, sold his interest in the river boat, and joined the stream of men moving north. He arrived with the first of them, staked out a paying claim and panned quite a poke of dust. Then he

discovered that the real Alaska mines were the honkytonks, supply stores, and transportation facilities. So he traded his poke and claim for a ramshackle steamer and opened up shipping lanes on the Yukon.

He saw fine young men go up the river, to come back old and worn and disillusioned from their experiences. He saw towns grow and die. Men make millions over night. Men lose fortunes in a single card game. Once Cap ran his old steamer through a bad flood and saved hundred of people from dying in the mad river. But the flood was the last of his adventures in Alaska. For, while he was trying to pull a handful of men out of the turbulent waters, he ran too close to a reef and lost his ship in the rapids. Again he was destitute, lucky to be alive.

Cap saw that the Yukon days were over for him, that he was getting old. He had seen the clipper ships come and go. He had been with the river packets almost to their end. And now he had followed the gold rush to a finish. He found some work up there in one of the mining camps, saved his money, and came back to Maine.

It was up there that we met him several years ago. He was an old man then, but only old in years. He really hadn't given himself any time in his life to age, and in spirit he was as young and modern as any of us. He used to talk by the hour, before his open fire, of his experiences. He said they were as much fun to reminisce over as they were to have. If he had his ninety years to live over again he would do the same thing.

"It's all right for old men like me to sit around and rot," he told us the last time we saw him. "But you young fellers have to go out into the world, to feel the salt sea brine blowing wet against you, to smell the muddy river in summer, and to see men throw away the lives God gave them, and that for a mere bag of gold. Then you know what you are on earth for, and when you pay your long visit to your Maker you can tell Him He didn't waste His time putting you together. And He'll smile with you."

Now old Cap has gone on. He is sleeping his last, high up on a spruce-covered hill overlooking the string of lakes where he first stepped out into the world. And over his grave is a native granite boulder where his friends have carved a little inscription:

"He will live forever in the hearts of youth."

Trail Pards

IN the same mail, the other day, two letters came to the *North•West Stories* office, one from a sailor in Cuba, the other from a young man in Wisconsin. Both men are going to hit the high road for adventure and romance but before they leave they want to find trail pards. They are hunting for real pals, men who will share their thrills with them, and will divide the hardships fifty-fifty.

North•West Stories is always glad to lend a hand to prospective adventurers starting out on the trail. We hope that the letters reprinted below will help these two wanderers find their partners and will assist in forming a life long friendship. Happy trails!

DEAR EDITOR:

I am a sailor in Guantanamo but will be out of the Navy in May. Even though I have been around some already it has only made the wanderlust stronger in me and when I am through with the Navy I want to travel on my own. I have always longed for romance and adventure and can't seem to get my fill of it. Do you think you could find a pal for me, a fellow who would want to wander about the world hunting new adventures? I am just twenty years old, am six feet two inches tall, and know how to take care of myself in strange places. I would also like a few Pen Pals if I could get them.

E. C. EDGELL,
U.S.N. Station,
Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

DEAR CHIEF:

I want a pal to accompany me on a hike around half of the United States, starting West from Wisconsin to California, then to Texas, New Orleans, and back up the Missis-

sippi to Wisconsin. Or perhaps it would be more fun to camp for a month in the wilds of Canada. I'd like to hike into a place where you have to pack your supplies on your back, and where your nearest neighbors are forty miles away. I am twenty years old and would prefer a pard of about the same age. If any one is interested I'll go into more detail, and if anyone has a better idea than mine I'd be glad to consider it.

GLENN M. CLARKE,
129 Graham Avenue,
Whitewater, Wisconsin.

Homesteading

DID you ever dream of the old West days when a man could pile all his family belongings on a rickety waggon and head out for the open country and cut a real home out of the wilderness? Did you ever wish you could go too? Most of us have. But few of us have ever done anything about it. For we are entirely too prone to think of homesteading as past history. We dream of it as real adventure—as adventure that was available for our grandparents, but not for us.

But in that we are wrong. There is still a lot of public land out west. Plenty of it! Uncle Sam has thousands and thousands of acres that he wants to give away. It is yours if you want it. You can start out tomorrow, load your family and your belongings in the old flivver, and hit the trail to the sunset—and a homestead!

Most of the best land is in Oregon, Idaho, Nebraska, California and Alaska. There is a bit in nearly every other state west of the Mississippi. Some of it may not be worth your stakes, may be practically valueless. But a few miles further on you may find the place you have dreamed about. Irrigation projects are opening up great new areas of fine grazing and farming country. Railroads are bringing new ranges nearer to the world's markets. And men and women with the old frontier spirit are building homes in the new land that their generous country is giving them.

It always makes us especially happy to know that readers of *North•West Stories* are taking advantage of the modern frontiers and are still pioneering the same as their fathers before them. Last week a letter came to the office from one of these men. He has established a homestead in South Dakota and is satisfied with his prospects. He wants to help you to find your place in the world so we are reprinting his letter below. Before we close, *North• West Stories* wants to congratulate Charlie Hill on the success of his venture and wish good luck to all of you who are starting out to follow in his footsteps.

WELL FOLKS:

I have traveled a lot through the United States and Canada, have worked at many jobs all over America. But I never found anything that pleased me as much as my present occupation. I couldn't seem to save up much money so decided that with only a small capital there was nothing one could do better than homestead. To have a home of your own in such a short time? It seemed too grand for me. But I was too warmed up to the proposition to drop it, and started out on the hunt for a suitable location.

We went by automobile over a lot of different states in the country and up into Canada. Finally we found what suited, a grass country in South Dakota. So I took out a six hundred and forty acre claim and now have a well improved farm. The ranch is deeded clear from debt and is on a paying basis. We have a good home now and feel better toward the world and the people. If any of the readers of *North•West Stories* are interested we'd be glad to tell them where to find homesteads in the various states and will tell them of conditions as we found them.

I am around six foot one tall and am thirty years old. Life on the ranch keeps me in the best of health and spirits. I'll be here all winter with only chores to do and will have lots of time to write letters. Tell me of your travels and I'll swap yarns of mine. If you want to homestead I'll do all I can to tell you how to go about it. Only thing I won't swap is trouble. For I have none of my own.

Good hunting up here too. Several of the boys have brought in their Elk and Deer today. In the spring there is fine trout fishing almost in my back yard. You aren't cut away from the world either. Mail every day, and the radio is always fine. Sort of wish I could invite you all up here for a stay. But I guess I can't.

Yours for homesteading.

C. HILL,
Star Route,
Edgemont, South Dakota.

Breaks No Cameras

DEAR EDITOR:

Please allow me to congratulate you on the fine show of stories which are appearing in *North•West Stories.* You certainly deserve credit for the way you put them out. We have some good magazines over here, but they lack the kick one gets out of *North•West.*

I am also interested in your Good Fellows Section. Perhaps there are some of your Western readers who would like to correspond with a lonely fellow-reader from the East. I am an ex-Lancer, age thirty, five feet eight inches tall, dark hair, and haven't broken any cameras yet. Am very fond of horses, dancing, and all outdoor sports. Have traveled in nine countries, and would like to swap yarns with readers of both sexes. I promise to answer all letters received.

Wishing *North•West* a continued success in the future.

Yours faithfully,
W. C. TOORD,
167 Beaumont Rd., Leyton E. 10,
Essex, England.

Throws a Mean Ink Loop

DEAR EDITOR:

I'm just another kid from the good old Lone Star State wanting to join your Pen Pals club. I've sort of been in it a long time now, for I always read *North•West Stories* and, believe me, there's no other magazine like it.

I'm a farm boy, and down here the country is so big a fellow's friends are far apart and a couple of dozen writing pals would be appreciated. I'm nineteen years old, five feet eleven inches high, have blue eyes and black hair and am long legged enough for folks around here to call me "Racehorse." I want to correspond with teachers, dancers, preachers, actresses, flappers, mounties, and so forth. Come on, I'll sling ink in all directions.

BURON WIGGINS,
Route 3, Plano, Texas.

Far From It

DEAR EDITOR:

The other day I asked my sister to buy me an adventure magazine, meaning an English one. She, like most sisters, picks the first one she comes to, that being *North•West Stories.* Well, I raved at her, like most brothers, and pretty soon I was so mad I sat down and read that magazine just for spite. And now I'm sure glad I did. I've a good mind to treat my sister to a movie or something or get her a box of candy. The stories were fine and I read the whole book in one sitting.

I'm an adventurous chap myself. But I've got to stick around a while longer until I'm old enough to do what I like. Then watch my smoke. So, since the next best thing to having adventures is to read about them and your stories sure make you feel as if you were right there, I'm going to haunt the book stalls for every *North•West Stories* I can find.

Wonder if I could get some pen pals among your readers. I am seventeen years old, five feet eleven tall. I am always looking on the bright side of things and haven't a worry in the world. But I would like someone to write to, mounties, cowboys, or any other inhabitants of the wide open spaces. And, by the way, I'm not adverse to corresponding with the other sex—far from it!

ROBERT CLASH,
77 Wakeman Road, Kensal Rise,
London N.W. 10, England.

Twin Letters

DEAR EDITOR:

Both my sister and myself have been readers of your magazine ever since our arrival in Hawaii from Australia and we dare say that *North•West Stories* is one of the best of magazines that we have read. We are anxiously awaiting every new magazine you put out. It should be published every week instead of every month. After we have read it we send it home to our friends in Australia and they seem to like it as much as we do.

We are twins, 20 years old and we would be glad to answer every letter we get and tell all about either Hawaii or Australia. And in addition, we will be glad to trade snapshots.

JOHN and CECILIE,
Box 147,
Scofield Barracks, T. H.

Merry Brown Eyes and Cowboys

DEAR EDITOR:

I've been reading your dandy little magazine for ever so long and, gee, it's getting better every day. But I still get that lonesome feeling and I want some pen pals worsen anything.

Maybe I had better describe myself before I make any more noise. I'm female, eighteen, five and a half feet high, weigh one hundred and thirty-six, sport brown curly hair and merry brown eyes. That's me, and no one ever went blind looking at me. I just love all kinds of sports, reading, dancing, and art. My head passion is reading Western magazines, mostly *North•West Stories,* and I've spread them so thick around the house mama is just about wild. And cowboys? I adore them! They are so clean living and brave. Wish I knew some! Maybe you can get a lot of cowboys to write to me, just oodles of them. I like all sorts of wanderers too, soldiers, sailors, city kids, airplane mechanics, and COWBOYS!

LYDIA GREEN,
Route 2, Irving, Kansas.

Canadians Ahoy!

DEAR EDITOR:

Your Pen Pal scheme is somewhat of a Godsend to me. For I am in dire need of writing friends. If anything, I would prefer Canadians, I am going to emigrate to Canada as soon as I am a civilian and want to know about the ways of life in that nation. I have traveled a good deal and have much to talk about. Motoring, swimming, cycling and hiking are my chief interests. I am twenty-six and hail originally from London.

C. DENMAN,
Wazinolian Med Sector, Royal Artillery,
Razmak Camp, Wazinastan, N.W. F,
India.

Blondes or Brunettes? Who Cares?

DEAR EDITOR:

Even since the B.C. subscribed to *North•West Stories* and *Air Stories* the charge of Quarters has been pestered to near extinction by the boys dunning him for the magazines two or three weeks before they arrive. Then the poor egg who gets the book first is smothered to death by the rest of the gang trying to read it over his shoulder. So we have quite a time and all get together to kick because the books come out only once a month.

To fill in the odd moments we want hundreds of pen pals, mostly girls. No age limit, short or tall, blondes or brunettes. Who cares? Only requirements is that they can write. And if we get more than we can handle we have ninety buddies right here to give us a hand. We would have enclosed descriptions, but since we would only flatter ourselves, we will postpone it until we answer the letters.

CPL. LLOYD E. SIMMONS,
PFC. JOHN C. BOYLE,
Battery F, 59th C.A.
Fort Mills, P. I.

Red Headed Old Maid with Wooden Leg

DEAR EDITOR:

On reading your magazine I will say I'm well pleased. Mostly, I read it backwards, beginning with the *Port of Missing Men*, then the letters and comments, and finally the stories.

I'm a northerner myself. Have chalked up sixty years already but they haven't done any damage to me. Have been wearing a wooden leg for the past thirty-two years and it never kept me from climbing mountains or hunting or fishing, or anything else. Usually I get along fine with people until they start whitling shavings off my wooden leg.

My hobby at present is raising blue fox. They are easy to grow. I have the experience and land and want a pard. Prefer a young man who can put up enough shuneau (dough) to show his good intentions. And besides the pard I want to correspond with a red headed old maid with a wooden leg that can run a typewriter, and spell, and punctuate.

By the way, blue fox are grandparents before a calf finds out she will grow up someday to be a cow like her mama.

O. M. HARRY,
Box 556, Haines, Alaska.

You're Welcome, Bob

DEAR EDITOR:

Words from me cannot thank you too much for what you have done in the way of finding me pals in the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. I think your method of bringing strangers together and making friends is a great one. I like *North•West Stories* just as much as I like writing to the friends that your wonderful magazine has found for me. Please tell those girls and boys I have plenty of room yet in my mail bag. Plenty of photos and news to send them. Once again I say, "Thank you."

ROBERT ASKEW,
Puha, Gisborne,
Poverty Bay, N. Island,
New Zealand.

Old Songs for New Friends

DEAR EDITOR:

A couple of years ago you printed a letter of mine and I sure got a lot of pen pals from it. I need more if I can get them, but that isn't the reason why I'm writing this. I am wondering if *North•West Stories* readers will help me cheer up my mother.

She is lonesome and blue and I promised I would help get someone to write to her. She would like to hear from other mothers and also from young people. She lives in Burket, Indiana, and her name is Mrs. Estella Cochran.

I'd like some more writing friends too. I am just a cowboy age twenty-one, have blue eyes and dark brown hair, and it had to be curly. I live on a ten thousand acre ranch way up in the northwestern part of the country. The stage brings the mail up the canyon once or twice a week and if there was a letter for me on it I wouldn't kick. I have some pictures of the cow country to give away and also some real old time songs.

VIRGIL WHITESELL,
Grass Valley, Oregon.

Big Hearted Readers

DEAR EDITOR:

I wonder if some of those big hearted readers of *North•West Stories* would sit down for a few minutes and write to a Jerseyite. No necessity of making cracks about mosquitoes. I won't send live ones in my answers. I'm a little guy, but capable, and want a lot of people to write to. I'm a painter by trade, and my hobby is photography. Want to hear from boys and girls, sixteen to sixty, and will do my share to be interesting.

EDWIN W. WINNETT,
717 Springdale Ave.,
East Orange, N. J.

WRITING FRIENDS WANTED

THE MOST LONESOME make the best pen pals, Barbara says. So she wants to hear from only those people who are very lonely and really want friends. It took twenty-one years to put all of her five feet four of blondness together. And in that time she has learned to write really swell letters. Barbara Bonoskn, 139 S. Fifth St., Duquesne, Pa.

A PAIR of girls want dozens of readers of *North•West Stories* to write to them. They have a lot of interesting things to tell, too! Angeline is five feet four. Her hair is blonde and curly and her eyes are gray. Cecile is only five feet one. Her eyes are hazel and her hair is curly and black. Between the two of them they make two hundred and twenty-five pounds of writing energy. Guess how much that is apiece. Angeline Doda, 1314 Minnesota Ave., and Cecile Lenda, 1332 Minnesota Ave., both in S. Milwaukee, Wisc.

FAIR SEX, here's your chance. He is an Irish lad, twenty-four years old, and five feet ten tall. John J. Burke, 1810 W. 47th St., Cleveland, Ohio.

AN ARTIST would like to have a few pen pals in the Western States. She is thrilled by the mountain scenery, the cow country, and the people who live there. Mrs. Belle Close, General Delivery, Phoenix, Ariz.

GOOD YARNS to spin for those who write. Corporal Smith has traveled extensively. From England he went to China, then Egypt, and now to India. He is twenty-four, has dark hair, blue eyes. Cpl. D. Smith, B Company, Seaforth Heights, Jhansi, India.

PEN PUSHERS, please proceed pushing a little ink my way. I am a young chap, twenty-two, with a big yen to hear all about the great West where *North•West Stories* are set. B. K. Williams, 41 Somerset Rd., Edgbaston, Birmingham, England.

SAINT LOUIS BLUES are being chased away these days by hundreds of letters. Everyone is writing to Katheryn. Why not you? She is five feet and a third tall, sports a couple of the bluest eyes and a good head full of the waviest blonde hair. She likes swimming and dancing—and reading and writing letters. Katheryn Smith, 1008a Armstrong Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

THERE IS NOTHING very definite about Ron. He has traveled some and has written some. He is almost six feet tall, weighs something like nine stone, and is about eighteen and a half years old. His hair is kind of fair and his eyes are more blue than anything else. He has a supreme sense of humor and filled his letter to us with wisecracks. You had better try him out. Ronald Robbins, Norfolk Lodge, Trinity Pl., Eastbourne, Sussex, England.

DON'T FOIL ME. Get out your pen and ink and slip me a line. I can read and write both French and English and, if the occasion arises, can combine the two. George Tremblay, 60 Colombe St., Acushnet, Mass.

THOUSANDS OF PEN PALS would not be enough. But maybe two or three would be if they were real friends. Lucile has managed, these eighteen years, to put one hundred and thirty-five pounds of herself together in one piece five feet four inches high. She decked out the top with a nice mop of dark hair and a couple of brown, brown eyes. That's all she told us about herself. If you want any more information you had better write for it. Lucile Smith, Route 3, Laurel Hill, Fla.

WANTS OLD BUDDIES back. The gang that were in the Fourth Company, C.A.C., at Sandy Hook; Battery C, Fifth Battalion, French Mortars; and those who were in Vitrey, France, the latter part of 1918. Have been in China these past two years and have lots of thrilling experiences to pass on. Morris Near, U.S.S. Fillamooh, Mare Island, Calif.

PICTURE POSTCARD shower. How about it, gang? Do I get it or not? Postcards, views, and all such will make a big hit. Miss M. A. Olson, R.F.D. 1, Thief River Falls, Minn.

NEW ZEALANDERS PREFERRED, or people residing in Gerald, Sask, Canada, are wanted as pen pals by this young Englishman. Age 30, height is five feet eight, fair complexion, and a big yen to write and be written to. H. Hawkins, 38 Broad St., Pendleton, Manchester, England.

NEW ENGLAND THIS TIME. Al likes people from the puritan states. Why not? He's from one himself and he prefers to be within calling distance of the best pals he makes. He is just twenty-four years old and stands six feet one. Alfred F. Milenski, 118 Gregory Boulevard, East Norwalk, Conn.

AND NOW the whole world! It's a lady, and her tastes take in the entire universe. Just now she is in bed but soon will be up again, and in the meantime she wants lots of pals. Miss Marie D. McLeod, Arcola, Sask, Canada.

WANTS TO MAKE people happy and become less lonely in the doing. Music and outdoor sports are his specialty. Anthoney Napoleon, 2100 S. 67th St., Philadelphia, Pa.

LIVING IN ANTICIPATION of dozens of pen pals. Real stage and vaudeville folk preferred, but anyone would be more than welcome. Elaine Whitehead, Third House, Cleveland Ave., Claymount Heights, Del.

COWPUNCHER wants to rope in a couple of pen pals. Would like to swap snapshots with his lady friends. Or, if you prefer, he will send a picture of his horse. Frank Watts, care W. R. Kirkwood, Route No. 2, Mountain Air, New Mexico.

A JOB FOR THE UNEMPLOYED. Give you three guesses what? It is writing nice letters to a little lady of "twenty summers, black wavy hair, blue-gray eyes and sixty-two inches." When she feels that way she calls herself "Skeets." But the postman is not a pal of hers, so you had better address your letter to: Marie Gorman, 747 East 65th St., Chicago, Ill.

ANOTHER JOB? Here is someone hunting one, not giving them. He is a young Englishman, automobile mechanic by trade, but willing to do about anything to live in America. Age is 22, height five feet seven. He is husky and ambitious and smart. Clifford Radnidge, 208 Cheltenhem Road, Briston, Glos., England.

THOUSANDS OF HAPPY PEOPLE all over the world were sad before they began using the *Writing Friends* corner in *North•West Stories.* That is what Fred says, and he adds that he is not one of them but expects to be. He writes about himself: "I am twenty-one, seventy inches, and quite a nice lad. Keen on America and her people." How about shoving him over the top into that group of thousands that he tells about? Frederick Davies, 46 Mackenzie Road, Liverpool, England.

"I AM SWEET SIXTEEN," Barbara wrote us the other day. She added a few other items that everyone should be interested in. Five feet three, dark hair, brown eyes. She is all excited over real outdoor sports and also likes dancing. "And do I love to write letters!!" Well, guess we've done our bit and if the Canadian mails aren't swamped with letters we'll be surprised. Barbara Goodwin, Lower Argyle, Yarmouth Co., Nova Scotia, Canada.

BANDITS PREFERRED. Or nice boys and girls will do if they write good letters. "But I want lots of bandits." Jean didn't say anything more about herself. But we hope she gets her wish, just the same. Jean Anne Smith, 117 Alden Ave., New Haven, Conn.

HER FRIEND WAS LUCKY, so why shouldn't she be? She's writing in to find out who wants to write to a five-foot, blue-eyed little lady with brown hair, just bubbling over with the desire to write. Vera Louise Haynes, 1120 No. Lafayette Ave., Chanute, Kan.

FROM ANY PART of the world, you can write to this blue-eyed blonde lady. She's single, five foot four, weighs a hundred and twenty-nine pounds, has twenty-three years of living an interesting life to tell you about. Donelda Sutton, Lock Box 16, South Lansing P. O., Lansing, Mich.

YANKEE GIRLS he wants to hear from, he does. And he wants them to be anywhere from twenty to twenty-six years of age. He'll send them snapshots and souvenirs with his letters, in which he will re-assure them that he touches no liquor, and that's "on the level." Film fan, too. William A. Davis, 13 Langeley Lane, Vauxhall, S.W.8., London, England.

LIKES WIDOWS AND ORPHANS says a lonely young fellow from St. Louis's barren lands. And he prefers them lonely like himself because he can cheer them up and be cheered by them. 50-50 is his motto. He has traveled all over the west and loves it. Robert Pounds, 2132 Chouteau Ave., St. Louis, Mo.

BUDDIES IN PARADISE want to share their lonesome heaven with boys and girls all over the distant earth. Hawaii is a swell place but can be improved considerably. These boys read **North•West Stories** for its good clean yarns, but it doesn't come out often enough, they say, and they want something to read in between issues. A few letters would solve this problem and add that finishing touch to their island paradise. Cpl. Wallace DePriest, Cpl. Sam C. Beasley, Cpl. John W. Davis, Cpl. Jacob Wild, Battery A, 64th C. A. (AA), Fort Shafter, Honolulu, Hawaii, T.H.

GIANT BY THE SEA wants to give the lowdown on his home town to pen pals who might be interested. He is six feet two, minus his socks, and is seventeen years old. Swimming, dancing, gunning and racing are his favorite activities, but he is no slouch at pushing a pen and wants a little practice. He has a lot of spare ocean air that he would be glad to send to any place in the round world. C. J. MacDaniel, Seaside Park, New Jersey.

SHE LIKES HER UNCLE but he never writes letters to her even though he lives in the same house and could save on postage. So she wants some pen pals to brighten her long St. Louis nights. Seventeen years old, black hair, blue eyes, and one hundred and twenty pounds of writing ability. She'll swap snaps, and that tells a big story. Miss Gladys Jackson, 2132 Chouteau Avenue, St. Louis, Mo.

SHE COULDN'T WAIT for the new issue of **North•West Stories** to come out, so she wrote in right away. She has full expectations of becoming one of the gang, and we don't see any reason in the world why she shouldn't. Better write to her immediately. It'll be your good luck. Miss Esther Stewart, R.F.D. No. 5, Lancaster City, Pennsylvania.

PHONOGRAPH, Silvertone portable. Will trade for any type telephone. Ethridge Hyatt, Morton, Miss.

HE HAS TRAVELED all over the Northwest and the South, been in Canada and Mexico, and now he wants to drop in on the pen pals and take a look around. Lawrence Trust, 18 N. Lewisque, Waukegan, Ill.

TALL HOMBRES get lonesome too, occasionally. That is why this fellow who is over 6 feet, weighs 160 and is 24 years of age, is sending out his plea. No entrants barred. O. N. Lawless, U.S. C. E. 100, Staten Island, N. Y.

THREE BACHELORS have banded together for protection and now feel capable of handling any mail that comes their way, no matter how dangerous. Not that you need to address them **en masse.** All three are well worth considering and you can take your choice of Charles Morgan, Lester Riegle, Walter Riegle, 307 Warber R.D.S.E., Canton, Ohio.

A KILTIE out in the Far East wants a chance to spin some good yarns to friends of any age and any sex. He has been in Egypt, China and all through India. Charles Gillespie, B. Company, Seaforths, Jhansi, India.

COMPETITION HERE. A brother and sister got into a little argument the other day and she said that she would get more writing friends than he would. It's her red hair no doubt because his is brown. She is 25, 5 ft. 2, weighs just 110 and has hazel eyes. He is 22, 5 ft. 10, weighs 160 and has brown hair and eyes. So take your choice and place your bets. And of course there is one way of making certain. Miss Dixie Carvell or Leon Carvell, 2727 Frederick St., Shreveport, La.

SHE ADMITS that she has a weakness for men that are tall—6 ft. or so. But, as well, she likes them good hearted, refined and between the ages of 35 and 45. She admits she is a trifle old fashioned as she does not like jazzing around but she does like wholesome fun. Good looking, golden haired and blue eyed is Miss Helen L. Yauch, Buhl, Minn. Care Mrs. Chas. Krueger.

WESTERNERS are the ones she would like to hear from. She is a gay little girl with pretty brown eyes, fond of dancing and ice-skating. Leone Donaldson, Newark, S. Dak., Box 443.

CAN SHE DANCE, sing, swim, and cook? She'll tell you if you write, and she likes to write better than all four put together. She's a little girl, only a hundred and eleven pounds, has light brown hair, and the biggest hazel eyes you ever saw. The name she sports tells you a lot. It's Lovely Benson. Lives at Valley, Washington. Write care of Wright.

SHE HAS PICTURES of Richland Springs Cavern which her uncle explored last year, and they're yours for the asking. She's a farm girl, lonely, weighs a hundred and thirty-eight, is five feet eight inches tall, with lovely dark brown hair and eyes. She has a passion for outdoor sports, and mostly for letter-writing. Gladys Grunewald, Route "A", Kenedy, Texas.

THIS SAILOR has been around plenty in the U. S. Navy, the Merchant Marine, and now the U. S. Coast Guard. What he wants to do is to tell you about all the places he's been, and it doesn't matter much whether you're male or female, except—well, girls, we just have a hunch. John Humphrey, *U.S.S. Acushnet,* Woods Hole, Mass.

TWO JOLLY LADS ON A ROCK, and no mail. The rock, we may as well tell you, is Gibraltar. And the two jolly lads are in the British Army. They've been to India, Egypt, Shanghai. They say the mailmen on Gibraltar are a flop, so far, and they want all the pen pals to give them some work to do, meaning the mailmen. Girls are especially invited. Pte. Lilley and Pte. Millward, C Company, 1st Linc's Regt, Windmill Hill, Gibraltar.

SENORITAS AND MADEMOISELLES, he faithfully promises to answer every letter. This from a Chicago boy who says he wants letters by the boatload from Pacific Islands, by the airplane-load from Europe and Asia, and by the trainload from the States. Edward G. Zuiker, 137 East 115th Street, Chicago, Illonois.

WITH A WEAKNESS for the ladies, two British Tommies of military carriage write in to tell us that they want some lads and lassies to splash them with ink, friendly and *pronto;* and when you're writing to them, don't forget that they're a happy-go-lucky, don't-care-a-whoop pair of fightin' soldiers, weak and willing. Don't forget, too, to write some about sports—any old sport—because they like 'em. Mr. Jack Alan Greenacre and Mr. William Hank Attewell, C. O. The "Band," 1st E. S. Rgt., Dagshai, Simla Hills, India.

HE WHO HESITATES doesn't get a snapshot of Terry and Ruth, two little girls from Elmont, L. I. They're five foot two and five foot four, both have brown eyes, and one has black hair, while the other sports auburn locks. If you're really anxious to find out which of those measurements belongs to which, you'd better write and find out. Their letter to us sure was encouraging. Ruth and Terry Brandt, 161 Carnegie Avenue, Elmont, L. I., New York.

A YOUNG AUTHOR writes in from his "cattle ranch" in the Show-Me State. He hasn't been there all his life, though. Can write about Europe and all the odd corners of the United States. Carl Brian, R11, B. 195, Jeff. Bks., Missouri.

AN INDIAN BY BIRTH, she says she is. Has brown hair and eyes, weighs a hundred and thirty, and is twenty-years of age. She loves horses and dogs, does a lot of swimming and hiking. She'd like someone to write her a good long letter about the West, for which she's always had a hankering. And what's most important, she's crazy about **North•West Stories,** and so are you—so why not get together? Miss Esther Stewart, R. F. D. No. 5, Lancaster City, Pa.

"I AM QUITE a lonesome gal, wants to hear from a Pen Pal. Write to me real soon and see just what the reply will be." Straighten that all out, and darned if it isn't poetry. Don't see how we could add to it; but you can—by writing to Miss Mildred Finger, 1934 South Troy Street, Chicago, Illinois.

STARVED for Pen Pals. Do you hear that, you Mounted Policemen and trappers who penetrate the northwoods for pelts? It comes from a gentleman who's all set to give you the lowdown on coal mining in return for the lowdown on your experiences. Fred Oplinger, 40 West Market Street, Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

GIRLS DO WRITE more interesting letters than men, claims this young Norwegian. He represents the "Land of the Midnight Sun" in Canada so he has two countries he can describe intimately. Twenty-six years old, dark brown hair, blue eyes, fair complexion; a good dancer and swimmer and fond of fishing. He has some snaps that need trading. G. Donnem, Royal Norwegian Consulate, 1410 Stanley St., Montreal, Canada.

SLEEP AND READ is about all a fellow can do in the summer where this boy lives—and dream. Ever since he was a child, he's been wanting to see the ocean and the great North. So he would like particularly to hear from people who know the sea and the Northlands. But others will be mighty welcome also. Lester Summers, 1120 Claude St., Dallas, Texas.

BABY-FACE BLONDE with sea-green eyes just turned eighteen. . . . She is decidedly interested in America and Americans, in soldiers and sailors and bright young fellows. And she wonders if they are interested in her. Anita Burgess, The Nook, 178 Stoney Lane, Yardly, Birmingham, Eng.

LONESOME as a stray calf, is Bill. Come on, write! he says. William E. Barnes, care Irvin Randall, Londonsville, Ohio, R.F.D. No. 4.

COWBOYS, write to a young fellow who lives out in the bush in what was one time German East Africa. Sure a lonely life out there. He'd get a big thrill out of exchanging snaps, stamps and news with some of you pen pals. C. Bennet, Camp Salale, P.O. Ki Kale via Dar-es-Salaam, Tanaanyika Ter., Africa.

HER HOBBY is sketching in water-colors. Probably she chose that because she's so crazy about the out-of-doors. She reads a lot and swims, hikes, and paddles her eighteen-foot canoe. Girls around her own age, 25, are the ones she would particularly like to hear from. Kathryne Converse, P. O. Box 597, Poughkeepsie, N. Y.

A YOUNG FELLOW would particularly like to hear from folks in Montana and Wyoming. He doesn't say why, but you might ask him. Francis Murray, Remsen, Iowa.

HE WROTE to ten girls and boys and he only received one reply. That's not salve for a lonesome ache so he wants to put his situation in front of the gang. He feels he ran into some pals who were sort of loafing on the job. Well . . . Benjamin Socha, St. Clavisville, Ohio.

BUNTY GERALDS. Doesn't that name pique your imagination? Don't you feel like knowing what the person who owns that name is like? She has a nice round legible hand writing; soft brown hair and blue eyes. She says that she likes anything that promises fun and excitement. But what we would like to see is the snapshot she promises to send to all who write her. Bunty Geralds, Shilliwack, B. C., Canada.

A LONG WAY from home are these three nurses. They want to hear from some American boys between the ages of 19 and 20. They are Florence White, Sadie Murray and Edna A. Wiggins, Children's Sanatorium, Southport, Lancs, England.

YOU KNOW how it is when a fellow moves from some little town up-state into the big city. It all seems interesting, exciting—but unfriendly. That's how Phil finds it, even if he has a roadster that he can shoot out of town in when he wants. He is 24 years old, 5 ft. 9 and medium build. Phil Travers, Hotel Times Square, 43rd St., N. Y. C.

SHE THINKS that **North•West Stories** has IT, so we believe that she must be a thoroughly charming person and very discerning. She is 19 years old, English and interested in hearing from people anywheres, from 20 to 30, in any country in the world. Madelene Forryan, 12 Shortridge Land, Enderby, Leicester, England.

HE WANTS to learn about Uncle Sam's Army, Navy and Marine Corps, does this young fellow. So soldiers, sailors and marines are the logical ones to get in touch with, he thinks. He likes shows and movies. Blue eyes and 5 ft. 7 tall, slender. Arthur M. Grogan, 467 Utica Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

A GIRL, young, pretty and yearning for some pen pals. Who's going to gallop to her rescue? Ethel Paugh, P. O. Box 55, Vindex, Md.

ANYONE WANT a home? Here is a young fellow who lives up in the Adirondacks. He is looking for a pen pal who wants a home, American or Polish, and a place to work. Joe Mahoe, Box 314, Broadalb, N. Y.

PLENTY OF PEP is her outstanding characteristic. She's one of those pretty little things just over 5 ft. with light wavy hair and a clear white complexion. You'd think that probably she would only want to hear from men but she assures us that girls or men between the ages of 18 and 26 are equally welcome. Jeannie Wattson, 2235 Fullerton Ave., Chicago, Ill.

CHEER HER UP. It won't be difficult, she says; just a few nice letters. Soldiers and sailors have the reputation of writing beguiling epistles so why don't they try? Margaret Clark, 2181 West 61st St., Cleveland, Ohio.

TWO AIRMEN in the British air forces want to hear from Americans between the ages of 18 and 30; either sex. They introduce themselves as Leslie Hall and Harry Bursey, Electrical School, "B" Squadron, R.A.F., Cranwell Lines, England.

A STUDY IN BROWN is Bill. His hair is brown, and his eyes, and at present, his thoughts are a rather darkish shade. You can paint them brighter for William J. Porter, 14 Mayo St., Portland, Me.

RATHER CUTE so her boy friends say. For the rest, she is blue-eyed, blonde, and 5 ft. 2; in the third year of High. She wants to hear from men and girls. Bee Jacobs, 1152—7th St., Parnassus, Pa.

HE SPENDS many hours reading and writing as he has been laid up for a while. You can depend upon this young fellow for certain and prompt answers. John Atkinson, 57 North Jackson St., Mobile, Ala.

FROM LAND O'BURNS comes a call, a call for pals among the girls of America. It is a young Scotch athlete, 5 ft. 11, blue-eyed and blond. He plays football, hockey, golf, cricket, tennis and "rugger." He also likes motor-racing and is fond of going on long tours through the glen country. Martin H. Miller, Lynwood, Ayr Road, Ivine Ayrshire, Scotland.

SOUTHERN BELLE, who is modest about her looks, comes out and admits that she can write a pretty fair letter when she feels the urge. So see what you-all can do to make her feel the urge. Miss Sunshine Miller, 2727 Frederick St., Shreveport, La.

A SUBMARINE-BASE man, stationed in the middle of the Pacific, says he will blow us all out of the water if he doesn't start in getting some mail. On the other hand, write him and the first ten girls shall have their photographs tinted and sent back. The salty tar is 29, 5 ft. 5 and boasts dark hair and eyes. F. C. Shreve, U. S. Submarine Base, Pearl Harbor, T. H.

HAS SEEN BETTER states than Mississippi, he claims, but according to him there isn't a town anywhere like Pontotoe. He's a football player; plays on the high school team, and some day he hopes to make a name in college. Other boys and girls between the ages of 15 and 19, especially those interested in football, please write this young six-footer. Herron Wood, Pontotoe, Miss.

AFTER THE GREAT WAR these two officers are taking a rest. It is lonesome. Most their friends are dead, killed in action. They want to recruit some new friends from among the ranks of the pen pals. So write to Capt. Wm. Sterling or Lieut. C. Thompson, ward 16, Queen Alexandra Sanitorium, R.R. 7 London, Eng.

THE WOMAN WHO runs a chicken farm, a farm of any other sort, who could run a trapline, or do a little serious mining—that's the woman that this hardy daughter of the soil is looking for. She wants to be working out of doors and with the outdoor woman, and pay for the work is a secondary consideration. Sounds right interesting to us. How's for you to write her? R. Briggs, 36 South Avenue, Beacon, New York.

HAS A HORRIBLE TIME getting **North•West Stories** anywhere near up to date over in England. Any of you over there that know the secret, tell it to Fred Fallowes, Oldfield Yard, Town Street, Armles, Leeds, Yorkshire, England.

A SENSE OF HUMOR which goes a long way, has this brown-eyed Iowan. She's seventeen, five foot six, has brown hair with eyes to match, and what she can't do isn't worth mentioning. Swimming, hiking, skating, tennis, baseball, dancing, reading, writing poetry and short stories. And then she asks, "Nuff said?" We say "Yes and again yes." Wish we weren't so busy; we'd write ourselves. How about it, Pen Pals? Miss Peggy Harris, Box 55, Kirkville, Iowa.

A YOUNG MARRIED man in perfect health and used to hard work wants to hear from some Western ranch where they want such a man for year-round employment. References and further particulars to all and sundry interested. Paul Morris, Box 122, Lakeview, Ohio.

A SIX-FOOT HUSKY young man wants a job on a farm or ranch. He promises to work hard, so the lucky gent who is to get him better write pretty soon to Truman Evans, Albion, Nebr.

NOW YOU TAKE Mr. O. H. Hink. He's a dog-fancier, all breeds. He reads copies of **North•West** three nights running, and that's a record due congratulations. Regardless, he wants more of us. Pen Pals to help him forget this world's big holdup on the lines of progress and plenty. O. H. Hink, 31 Bennett Street, Moore Park, Sydney N.S.W. Australia.

THREE LONESOME SAILORS on Staten Island, N. Y., pulled a fast one on us. They're anxious to correspond with members of the fair sex, they'll tell the ladies all about their travels and experiences and they'll send snapshots. They sign themselves "Three Boys in Blue," and then it seems there are four of them. E. J. Cogan, Jr., Curtiss E. Vickers, Ralph D. Fisher and James F. Adams. Get any of them by addressing him c/o U. S. Coast Guard, Section Base No. 2, Staten Island, N. Y.

WHITE BEACHES, palms, towering volcanos, spell Hawaii. And on those lovely islands lives a pretty girl with brown eyes who likes music and poetry and pen pals. Miss Dorothy Tam, P.O. Box 138, Kahului, Maui, Hawaii.

AGE IMMATERIAL, men or women, it doesn't make any difference who writes to this young lady, so she says. She's 25 years old, 5 ft. 4 in. and pretty. Jean Carrigan, 134 So. Sacramento Bd., Chicago, Ill.

LONESOME FRENCH MISS is just too full of pep to keep still and wants to get busy with pen and ink. She is just sixteen, is five feet three, has wavy brown hair and dark brown eyes. Some day she hopes to be on the stage. And the way things look just now that won't be far off. So you had better hurry up and write before it's too late. E. Jacquard, 119 N. Lake St., Ironwood, Michigan.

THREE OF THEM, a girl 19, her sister, 15, and a brother who is 12, are all rarin' to answer letters from all types, colors and ages. Ella, Florence and George Bernard, 4017 LeErda St., Flint, Mich.

HAVING SERVED in the army in the Hawaiian Islands, South America and the West Coast, this young fellow has retired and gotten himself a job as a civil service employee in connection with a veterans' hospital. But he still wants to do a little wandering through the mails. D. D. Barrett, U. S. Vets Hospital, San Fernando, Calif., P. O. Box "A."

HATS OFF, GENTLEMEN, there's a poetess in our midst! This young lady wrote us a long self-descriptive poem, and if you sit right down and dash off a note to her you may be the fortunate hombre to correspond with a lady who told us "I'll be true." Anna Beth Goad, 312 Mulberry Ave., Anniston, Ala.

HE RAIDS LONDON Woolworth's to get his **North•West Stories** every time it comes out, so he must be one of us. Best way to find out is to write to him, and that means everyone from 16 to 100 years by the clock of any sex. His letter to us was great fun so we're advising you to get in on his stuff. Norman W. R. Smith, 22 Chequer Street, Luton, Bedfordshire, England.

WE SEEM TO HAVE a weakness for poetesses. Here's one who says she's interesting company, being twenty-two years of age, with brown eyes and hair. If you write to her, she'll write poetry back to you—"someone or anyone" is her plea. M. B. Parrott, East Jordan, Michigan.

THE TRADING POST

WHAT WILL YOU SWAP for a shotgun, hunting knife with scabbard, taxidermy course, and pair of powerful field glasses? Bill Sanders, 1601 State Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio.

ALL SORTS OF THINGS. Old stamps, coins, arrows, birds, beads, shells, agates, opals, amethysts, malachite, and a bin full of other semi-precious stones in the rough. Also have over two hundred large abalone shells and some polished geographs. Will swap for art negatives, art studies of children, or for old half dollars. N. J. Russell, Penyrm, Calif.

WHO HAS A JIG SAW? Will swap a flock of magazines and a lot of World War relics. Bernar Sofnn, 2302 Hazelwood Ave., Detroit, Mich.

ALL KINDS OF EMBROIDERY work, quilt tops, bedspreads and Indian arrows. Will trade for jewelry or old money. Miss Leafie McCoy, Gravette, Ark.

POLITICAL BUTTONS WANTED. Also badges, books, pamphlets, franked envelopes, speeches, or any kind of political material. Will exchange books, coins, stamps, views, or about anything you want. Orbra King, Philpot, Ky.

BOOK MATCH COVERS, magazines, and arrowheads. Will exchange for more magazines, a hunting knife, or bicycle. Homer Humphry, 411 Chestnut St., Aberdeen, Miss.

OLD U. S. COINS. Indian head pennies dated 1885 and 1887, two five-cent pieces dated 1868 and 1870, and an 1876 dime. What am I offered? Harry West, Cynthatio, Ohio.

WANT YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPER. Will exchange Cleveland papers for them. John Burke, 1810 W. 47th St., Cleveland, Ohio.

1866 OR PREVIOUSLY postmarked envelopes and 1917-1918 envelopes from A.E.F. men, wanted. Will exchange stamps magazines, books, and other things. Walter McIntosh, Lee Road, Scarsdale, N. Y.

ONE HUNDRED GOOD MAGAZINES. Would like a camera but am open to all good trades. John E. Pittman, 1152 Main St., Green Bay, Wisc.

CIVIL WAR SWORD and eighty old books. Will trade for an old six-shooter with shell belt and holster. Leo Doe, 332 Bunker Hill St., Charlestown, Mass.

HENS, DUCKS, GEESE, turkeys, pigeons, bantams, goats, fur-bearing animals, rabbits and other game birds, wanted. Will give in exchange rifles, shotguns, magazines, musical instruments, and collections of many kinds. John Zambella, 35 Ward St., Hyde Park, Mass.

WANT CLEAN EDITIONS. of American magazines. Don't want any two of the same name. Will send a suitable present in exchange. Isabel Carter, 282 New Hall Cave, Preston, England.

WILL TRADE .38 COLT'S SIX-SHOOTER, with silver-mounted holster and belt. Can use a good shotgun or pair of prism binoculars. Ernest F. Carlson, Little Falls, Minn.

HAVE ELECTRIC TATTOO OUTFIT, also salesmanship course, radio set, accordion, cornet, rifle, bugle, movie machine, antique music box, and lots of other things. Have you an offer? Albert Eyre, 414 Liberty St., Camden, N. J.

WANT SMALL PRINTING PRESS and equipment. Would prefer Kelsey, 5 by 8 or larger. Have Sun-Art plate camera four by five, with tripod, leather carrying case, two plate holders, copying lens, and a few dry plates. Also a Crossman Pneumatic Rifle with several thousand slugs. A. E. Chandler, Route 1, Box 9, Pownal, Maine.

SEND ME TEN INDIAN HEAD PENNIES, two liberty head nickles, or twelve unused one cent U. S. stamps and I'll send you one of the famous "Army and Navy" needle books. Would also like a good rotary mimeograph. Have electric fan, binoculars, portable talking machine. H. A. Garrett, Trumann, Arkansas.

THE PORT OF MISSING MEN

LAWRENCE MITCHEL. Last heard of in California. Why not drop us a line one of these days? Oliver Trombley.

BILLY. Where are you? Months are passing into years and we are no longer young. Was Boston just a dream? I am not in the North now, so letters addressed to me there will not reach me. Write care of this column. I am praying you will. Please. Lavender.

PITTS SISTERS, Velma and Opal. Please write. Velma is about 21 and Opal is 19. Both are tall and slender with brown hair and blue eyes. They are probably in the Southwest or in the oil country. Anyone knowing of their whereabouts communicate with **Paul Johnston, 1722 Mississippi Ave., St. Louis, Mo.**

OREE H. GRIFFEN. Left home in June, 1914. Last heard from in August, 1915. He has been in Parson, Kansas. Age is thirty-eight years. He served three years in the army just before the World War. Stationed in the Philippines most of that time. Tattoos on both arms, U. S. A. flag and eagle on his chest. Belonged to the 7th Cavalry, Troop B when in the army. Is a blond, blue eyes, weight about a hundred and fifty pounds, height is five feet five inches. Any information you can send will be greatly appreciated by his mother, Mrs. J. C. Griffin, General Delivery, West Hampton Beach, New York.

VELMA HALL. Last seen in LaJolla, California in 1928. I am married now and settled down. Please write. I was Francis Mooney then. Mrs. Francis Thatcher, Panama, Oklahoma.

WARREN HENRY SMITH. Born in Ligower, Pa. Last heard of in California just before the world war. Was a Spanish-American war veteran. Mother is still waiting for your return. Mrs. E. W. Gottlieb, Box 1580, Station C., Cleveland, Ohio.

GEORGE BINGLEY. Last heard of in Chicago. Golf pro. Anyone who knows present address please notify James Bingley, 29 Cambridge Street, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

STRAIGHT TO FICTION HOUSE MAGAZINES THE BULL'S-EYE

TO get right down to bedrock: In our stories we tell the world about go-get-'em hombres, rough and tough lads with hair on their chests and a knockout in their knuckles. Hard riders and fast shooters. But we aren't kidding ourselves. We know that the big majority of our readers are armchair pilots, stay-at-home adventurers—people who want to, but can't.

We all know that. So, in every issue of the FICTION HOUSE magazines we offer an adventure cruise that ranks right next to the real McCoy. Two thin dimes cover all expenses, tickets, passport—everything. North to the Arctic—south to Tahiti and the pearl lagoons—west to the rugged frontier. You can take your choice. And you can travel by land or sea or air. The foremost writers of today are the guides. They guarantee satisfaction—or your money back.

What's the route in the current issues—? Here she blows brothers—an outline of the high spots at the main ports-of-call:

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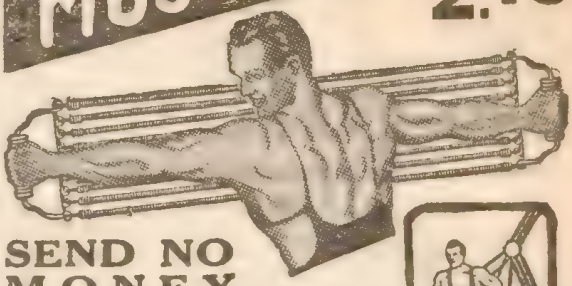

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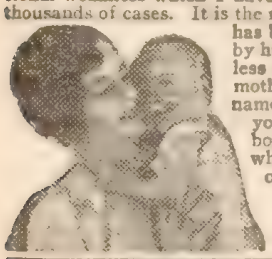

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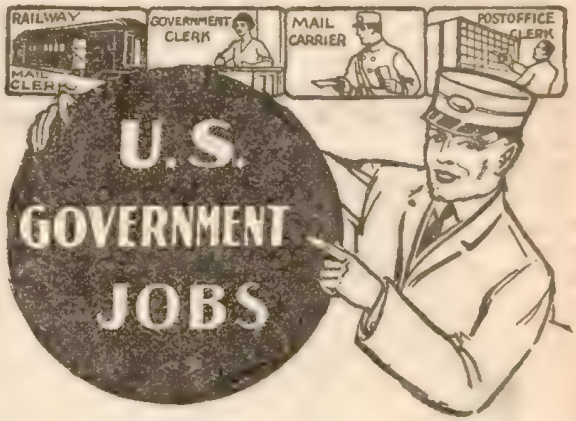

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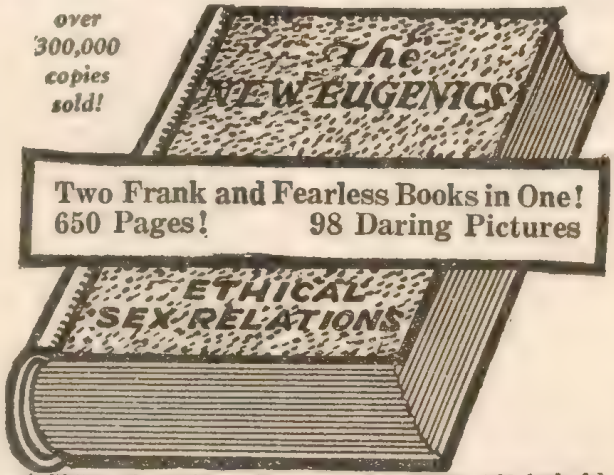

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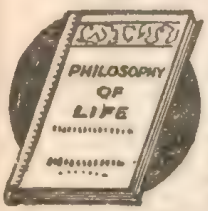

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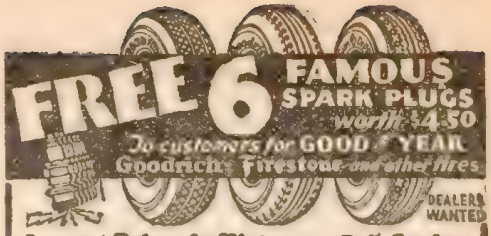

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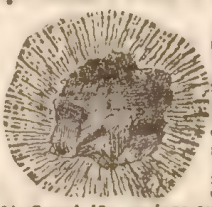

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Kidney Inactivity Makes Many Feel Old

If Poorly Functioning Kidneys Make You Feel Old, Run-down, Nervous, or Disturb Sleep, Make Guaranteed Cystex Test

While we must all grow old in time, thousands of men and women feel older than they are, all run-down and lacking in energy because of poorly functioning Kidneys and functional bladder irritation. Other pains such as Backache, Leg Pains, Smarting, Burning, and troubles such as Getting Up Nights, Extreme Acidity, Nervousness, Lumbago, Stiffness, Frequent Colds, Headaches, Dizziness, Circles Under the Eyes and Poor Complexion may often be due to sluggish functioning of the Kidneys.

Weather Affects Kidneys

If your kidneys have a tendency to be sluggish in function, you may have noticed that you are troubled more in the fall, winter and spring. This is because the weather is more changeable and severe and because of different foods and being more shut in. Another aggravating factor is the common cold, which tends to increase acidity. If your Kidneys function poorly you should be particularly on guard during and after colds.

Right Way to Aid Kidneys

When your vitality and energy are sapped your sleep frequently disturbed, or you suffer from other depressing conditions, caused by functional Kidney inactivity, accompanied by extreme acidity, you should have two medicines in order to get really satisfactory results. First: you need a medicine to act as a stimulant diuretic to the Kidneys, helping them in their function of filtering and purifying the blood, thus reducing acidity. Second: a medicine that soothes and allays sore, irritated membranes. Then nature really has a chance to restore normal function.

Every Druggist Has Guaranteed Medicine

Fortunately for sufferers nearly every drug store now has a medicine so successful in such functional Kidney conditions that it is guaranteed to be completely satisfactory or cost nothing. This combination treatment called Cystex (pronounced Siss-tex) is two different kinds of tasteless tablets in one package. It has a record of years of almost world-wide success and possesses the necessary double action to get really satisfactory results.

Cystex Praised by Druggists

Druggists are high in their praise of Cystex, because it is proving a blessing to so many of their customers. For instance, E. H. Tum, widely known druggist of Bucyrus, Ohio, recently said: "I consider the Cystex formula very good. One of my customers, who is 75 years old, told me that for 15 years he was bothered with Getting Up Nights but after taking Cystex he is in wonderful condition and sleeps well."

Druggists everywhere express opinions similar to that of Mr. A. R. Otis, Kendallville, Ind., 40 years a druggist, who says: "I have been selling Cystex for a number of years with very gratifying results. A great many customers tell us of the extreme benefit they receive. Being familiar with the ingredients of Cystex, I would say there is no question but what it will do 9 people out of 10 good."

Thousands of druggists have had the same experience as J. C. Shutz, a successful druggist in Madison, S. Dak., who says: "I have handled Cystex for three years and have guaranteed satisfaction or money returned with every sale. In all this time no one has yet asked for any money returned, which proves that Cystex works satisfactorily."

Ask your druggist—the man who knows medicines. He can tell you that Cystex does not contain any dopes or habit-forming drugs, but only the purest of highly beneficial ingredients.

Works in 15 Minutes

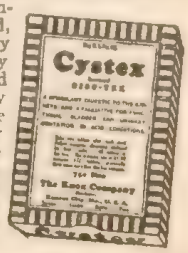
Another fine thing about Cystex that should please you is that it works so fast it starts circulating through the system in from 11 to 15 minutes. Because of this fast action sufferers report that there is no long waiting for results, and that great benefit often begins within 24 to 48 hours or so.

Guaranteed 8 Day Test

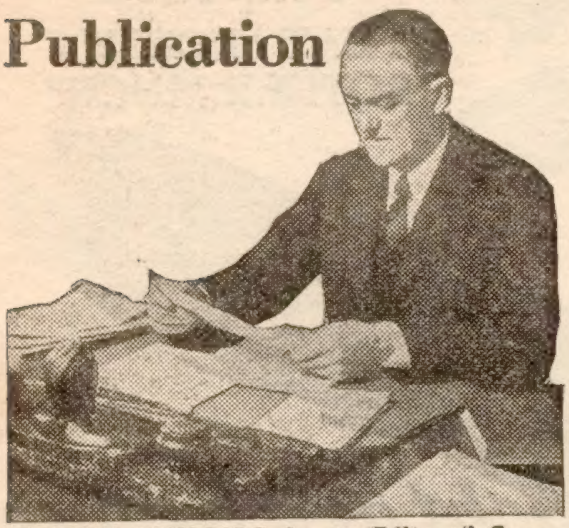
You don't have to risk a penny to see for yourself the great good that Cystex can do. Just ask your druggist for a package. Put it to the test for 8 days. See for yourself how fast and positively it works. If it makes you feel younger, stronger, sleep well and really able to enjoy life by combating these functional Bladder and Kidney conditions, the small cost will be a wonderful investment, but if not completely satisfied for any reason, merely return the empty package and get your 75c back under the written, legal guarantee. There is no reason to hesitate or waste time. The guarantee protects you. Ask your druggist for Cystex (say Siss-tex) today. If you can't go to your drug store, telephone and ask him to deliver Cystex—you are bound to be glad of it or it won't cost you a penny.

Guaranteed Trial Coupon

This coupon is your Guarantee on a full-sized, Eight-Day Treatment of Cystex. It is specifically understood and agreed that you are to be the sole judge and must be completely satisfied, or you merely return empty package and get your money back. The manufacturer protects the druggist. Clip this coupon now as a reminder to get Cystex today.



This Editor Leads Fiction Writers to Publication



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☐ Electrical Engineer	☐ Refrigeration
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THAT "DOESN'T BOTHER MUCH"

Actual size of Magic Dot. The new system weighs only 4 ounces, yet holds rupture more securely than pounds of steel springs, and hard, gouging cushions

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IF you had never seen an electric lamp and someone tried to describe it to you by comparing it with an oil lantern, it would not be understood. It seems about as useless to try to compare New Science System with the old-fashioned truss. But now rupture victims can abandon torturous trusses. For science has at last developed a tiny rupture device, weighing less than an ounce, which, together with the other parts of the system, has helped thousands of rupture sufferers and won the admiration of many doctors and scientists.

What Is Magic Dot System?

Its results are often so remarkable—so quick—you may wonder how such a simple invention could accomplish such benefits. It is a remarkable thing. It is a radical departure that makes utterly unnecessary the suffering often caused by knobs that gouge, steel springs that are harsh, leg straps and leather pads that are unsanitary and cumbersome.

It "Breathes" Air

Magic Dot anchors a flesh-soft padlet composed of a newly perfected substance named Airtex. This is honey-combed with microscopic air cells that tend to "breathe" air with each movement of your body. It expands and contracts as easily as your own flesh. When you walk, run, bend or exercise, it tends to squeeze itself—not the part of the body it rests against. Sanitation is now more sure—because the padlet can be washed clean and sweet in a jiffy.

New Possibilities

Just imagine a tiny padlet as soft as flesh—as light as desired—yet held securely in place at all times—whether you are standing, sitting, lying, exercising or movin, about. No slipping or skidding sideways. No constant readjustment as of old.

Test Sample Free

Send no money. Just mail the coupon for Free Sample of remarkable Airtex. See what it is. See how it "breathes" air and gives promise of amazing new comfort. Wash it and see why it is so sanitary and cool and clean. With it we send, without charge, latest copy of a very new and informative book on Rupture and Hernia that should open your eyes.

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Here is the inventor's unusual offer. If you will fill out and mail the coupon at the bottom, he will send full details of his "10-Day Trial by Actual Wear" offer on his newest Efficiency Model. This offer is so unusual that ruptured people should lose no time in mailing the coupon at the bottom for full particulars without obligation.

NEW SCIENCE INSTITUTE

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Send me full details of your "10-Day Actual Wear" trial offer on your newest Efficiency Model. Also include free sample of "light as a feather" material. This is not an order and does not obligate me in any way.

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Give me your measure and I'll *PROVE* You Can Have a Body like Mine!

I'LL give you PROOF in 7 DAYS that I can turn you, too, into a man of might and muscle. Let me prove that I can put layers of smooth, supple, powerful muscles all over your body.

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And with the big muscles and powerful, evenly-developed body that my method so quickly gives you, I'll also give you through-and-through health—health that digs down into your system and banishes such things as constipation, pimples, skin blotches and the hundred-and-one other ailments that rob you of the good times and the good things of life.

NOTE: No other Physical Instructor in the World has ever DARED make such an offer!

Charles Atlas

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Just jot down your name and address on the coupon below, mail it to me—and I'll send you, absolutely free, a copy of my new book, **"Everlasting Health and Strength."** It reveals the secrets that changed me from a 97-pound, flat-chested weakling into a husky fellow who won the title of **"The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man"** against all comers! And it shows how I can build you into an **"Atlas Champion"** the same easy way.

I haven't any use for apparatus; I don't dose you or doctor you. **Dynamic-Tension** is all I need. It's the natural, tested method for developing real men inside and out. It distributes added pounds of powerful muscles over your body, gets rid of ailments and surplus fat, and gives you the vitality, strength and pep that win you the admiration of every woman and the respect of any man.

Charles Atlas As He Is Today. (Photo taken July 5, 1931.)

Gamble a 2c Stamp — To Prove I Can Make YOU a New Man!

Gamble a 2c stamp today by mailing the coupon for a free copy of my book, **"Everlasting Health and Strength."** It tells you all about my special **Dynamic-Tension** method, and what it has done to make big-muscled men out of run-down specimens. It shows you, from actual photos, how I have developed my pupils to the same perfectly balanced proportions of my own physique, by my own secret methods. What my system did for me, and these hundred of others it can do for you too. Don't keep on being only 25 or 50 percent of the man you can be! Find out what I can do for you.

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